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ABSTRACT

Developed in response to changes in Australia's vocational education and training system to help maintain a skilled and adaptable workforce, this report examines principles and practices regarding arrangements for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) in Australia. The first section of the report discusses the context of report, highlights key principles of RPL, and provides definitions of key terms. The second section reviews recent developments in RPL, including the growing international acceptance and the application of RPL in Australia. This section also describes types of recognition, including appropriate placement of individuals in courses/programs, certification of skilled individuals to practice in regulated occupations, and assessment of employee competencies, and reviews the benefits for individuals, training providers, employers, immigrants, and the community. Section 3 discusses issues surrounding the implementation of RPL, including resource-efficient approaches, attitudinal barriers, costs, and standards for recognition. The final section describes exemplary practices in Australia for each stage of RPL, including publicity, initial support and counseling, applications, assessment, post-assessment guidance, and certification. Extensive appendixes provide findings from a national study of applications of RPL for vocational education students, higher education students, certified individuals in regulated occupations, and employers. A list of report contributors and 49 references are included. (MAB)

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Arrangements for the Recognition of Prior Learning in Australia

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VOCATIONAL EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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FOREWORD

This publication, *Arrangements for the Recognition of Prior Learning in Australia*, is derived from a report prepared by Leigh Toop and Judi Burleigh, of FOCUS Learning Systems, for the VEETAC Working Party on Recognition of Training. The research underpinning the report was based on widespread consultation with a diverse range of individuals from all Australian States and Territories.

It is appropriate that I reproduce the foreword from the FOCUS Learning Systems report, as it gives due recognition to the many people who freely gave of their time and resources. It is also appropriate, on behalf of the members of the VEETAC Working Party on Recognition of Training, that I thank Leigh Toop and Judi Burleigh for their significant contribution to the advancement of the recognition of prior learning in Australia.

Sue Christophers
Chair
VEETAC Working Party on Recognition of Training

FOCUS Learning Systems

FOREWORD

A significant feature of this study was the co-operation and support we received from members of the Project's Steering Committee, participating organisations and those individuals who made contact with us to provide information and share their views. Perhaps it is a direct reflection of the fact that those who are leading the way in this field are innovative and energetic. We also found them to be generous with their information, facilities and contacts.

In addition to the Members of the VEETAC Working Party on Recognition of Training, RPL Steering Committee, chaired by Dr Percy Worsnop, we gratefully acknowledge the extraordinary assistance to the conduct and findings of this study by Jill Jamieson and Marian Richards of Deakin University, Sally Davis and the team at Broadmeadows TAFE, Nigel Clark of Caltex, Mal Brumfield of Concrete Constructions, Karen Ho and the team at State Employment and Skills Development Authority (SESDA), and Peter Cronk, University of Southern Queensland.

Without the unstinting support of those who participated in the study, the positive outcomes would not have been possible.

Leigh TOOP
Judi BURLEIGH

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context

Significant changes are being made to Australia's vocational education and training system in an effort to develop and maintain a skilled, adaptable workforce. A number of related initiatives are combining to effect major changes in the preparation of future workers and the ongoing skills development of the current workforce.

Amongst the measures introduced to meet Australia's immediate and longer term human resource needs are:

* the development of national competency standards for industries and occupations which define what competencies are required in the workplace;

* the adoption of competency-based training with its emphasis on outcomes derived from the competencies expected in the workplace;

* award classifications linked to the acquisition and use of skills and competencies;

* the development of career paths for workers in restructured awards which seek to provide incentives for training;

* the merging of general education and vocational education and training at both the secondary and post secondary systems level;

* an expansion of entry level training places and opportunities;

* the recognition of a wider range of training providers (public, private, enterprise, community-based) and the means to include them in a national framework with articulation arrangements and national recognition of qualifications; and

* improved processes for recognising and using the skills and knowledge brought by migrants to this country.

There is a growing realisation that an initial "front-end" training program will no longer equip an individual or a worker for life. Continuing education and training throughout life is now seen as desirable and necessary.

For those now in the workforce, career paths are being defined with progression based on gaining new or more advanced skills. To take advantage of the career path possibilities, employees will need training.

One important means of encouraging them to take up the new training opportunities being created is to recognise, for a start, what they already know and can do, and build on that foundation. This form of recognition is commonly referred to as the recognition of prior learning (RPL). It means that the individual, the employer and the training provider will need to identify and recognise, in a formal sense, the competencies which have already been gained.

This report, examining the arrangements in Australia for the recognition of prior learning, was commissioned by the VEETAC Working Party on Recognition of Training, a working party established under the Vocational Education, Employment and Training Advisory Committee (VEETAC). VEETAC in turn provides advice to the Federal, State and Territory Ministers of Vocational Education, Employment and Training.

The study was commissioned by the VEETAC Working Party on Recognition of Training in mid-June 1992, after the release of two key policy documents, both of which directly referred to RPL:

* ***National Framework for the Recognition of Training - a report of the VEETAC Working Party on Recognition of Training***, November 1991, which was endorsed by VEETAC, and

* ***Assessment of Performance Under Competency-Based Training*** and ***Administration of Competency-Based Training*** - a report of the VEETAC Working Party on the Implementation of Competency-Based Training, circulated for discussion in May 1992.

Both of these reports sought to spell out the broad parameters, principles and processes to which the new Australian vocational education and training system would conform. These documents seek to provide a blueprint for the future.

In July 1992, Ministers of Vocational Education, Employment and Training signed the National Framework for the Recognition of Training (NFROT) Agreement. In signing the NFROT Agreement, Ministers committed themselves to implementing a vocational education and training system which allowed for national consistency in the recognition of accredited courses, training programs, training providers and competencies held by individuals. The broad parameters, principles and processes to which the States and Territories would conform, following the signing of the Agreement, are specified in the document. Amongst the key matters covered is the recognition of prior learning, which is to be governed by five key principles and six main process features. They are as follows:

Key Principles:

1. *The recognition of prior learning shall focus on the competencies held as a result of formal and informal training not how, when or where the learning occurred.*

2. *The recognition of prior learning underpins a system of competency based training. It is essential that training providers have a demonstrable commitment to recognising the prior learning of adults.*

3. *The recognition of prior learning shall be available to all potential applicants.*

4. *The recognition of prior learning shall involve processes that are fair to all parties involved.*

5. *The recognition of prior learning shall involve the provision of adequate support to potential applicants.*

The process for recognising prior learning will provide for:

1. *Assessment or evidence of the accumulated learning experiences of an individual in relation to the required competency;*

2. *Applicants to provide evidence as to how their prior experiences relate to the required competencies of the selected course;*

3. *A range of techniques to assess accurately the competencies held;*

4. *Support mechanisms to encourage and facilitate applicant's use of the process;*

5. *Clear criteria for deciding whether or not to grant recognition; and*

6. *A review phase.*

The aims of the study which led to the preparation of this report were to:

* identify how RPL is being implemented in States and Territories;

* identify best practices;

* identify issues involved in further implementation of RPL; and

* recommend support mechanisms necessary to extend the development and implementation of RPL on a national basis.

The study used a case study methodology to illuminate present practice, and to isolate best practice.

1.2 Definition of Terms and Structure of Report

The term "recognition of prior learning" has gained widespread acceptance in Australia, but it is worth noting that a variety of other terms are used in the literature, both in Australia and overseas, to describe much the same process:

- Assessment of Prior Learning
- Accreditation of Prior Learning
- Accreditation of Prior Achievement
- Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning
- Recognition of Current Competency

These terms have been coined by proponents to describe the process with some precision. The choice of terms reflects the particular emphasis the proponent considers important. For example, the words "assessment", "accreditation" and "recognition" while closely related, convey a slightly different sense of what is involved in the process.

While the terms found in the literature vary, there is common acceptance that these terms allude to the same process. Common themes and common concepts can be found in the definitions cited below.

Simosko, one of the seminal writers in this field, using the term "accreditation of prior learning", defined it as a

> *"process that enables people of all ages, backgrounds and attitudes to receive formal recognition for skills and knowledge they already possess. It is built on the premise that people can and do learn throughout their entire lives and that much of this informal and uncertificated learning can be equated with the skills and knowledge expected of learners completing more traditional and formal learning programs"* (Simosko, 1991, p.11)

In Simosko's definition, the "recognition" is provided by the training provider, and is expressed in terms of entry into, or advanced standing in, a formal program of learning.
Broadmeadows College of Technical and Further Education, which has done much of the pioneering work in this country, defines RPL as

> *"the acknowledgment of the full range of an individual's skills and knowledge - irrespective of how it has been acquired"* (Broadmeadows College of TAFE, 1990, p.9).

The use of the word "acknowledgment" extends the idea of recognition to the employer and industry, which has particular relevance in the Australian context.

Jessup adds a further dimension to the concept:

> *"To be more precise, with respect to"APL", what is being accredited is a candidate's current competence, based upon* ***evidence*** *of past achievements or past demonstrations of competence. Using evidence from the past is the distinctive feature of APL"* (Jessup, 1990, p.71)

In this report the definition used will be that provided in the National Framework for the Recognition of Training:

> *"Recognition of prior learning refers to the acknowledgment of skills and knowledge held as a result of formal training, work experience and/or life experience"*

It is accepted that it is the individual's **current competencies**, derived from whatever source, which are being acknowledged. The evidence produced in support of the claim for recognition, however, may well be drawn from the past.

The term "recognition of prior learning arrangements" is used to include the RPL process itself, the principles guiding the process, and the mechanisms and structures established to support its provision.

The reminder of this Report describes the following findings of the study:

- developments in the recognition of prior learning (Section 2);
- key implementation issues (Section 3)
- best practice in the recognition of prior learning (Section 4);

- case studies in the application of the recognition of prior learning:

  - for appropriate placement of students in accredited courses by TAFE (Appendix 1);

  - for appropriate placement of students in courses in higher education (Appendix 2);

  - in the right to practise in regulated occupations and in the certification of competencies (Appendix 3);

  - by enterprises for employment purposes (Appendix 4)

2. DEVELOPMENTS IN THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

2.1 Growth of Acceptance of the Recognition of Prior Learning

The interest in RPL is of fairly recent origin, emerging from an initial research project, the Co-operative Assessment of Experiential Learning conducted at Princeton, New Jersey in the late 1960's and early 70's. This project involved ten colleges and universities and as Simosko reports:

> *"..... the project demonstrated that:*
>
> 1. *It was possible to equate non-college learning with that of traditional college curricula.*
>
> 2. *It was feasible to use a wide variety of evidence in conducting valid and reliable assessments.*
>
> 3. *The emerging process could well be embedded in existing educational programmes and was of particular use with adults who were entering for the first time or returning to college or university with rich and varied experiential learning."* (Simosko, 1991, p.19)

Simosko and her colleagues, through the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), actively promoted the process. RPL is now offered, she says, by more than 1200 colleges and universities throughout the United States of America.

An exchange program was founded in 1980 to enable the United Kingdom educators and policy makers to visit American centres offering RPL (or APEL as it was called). In the early 1980s a number of RPL projects were initiated in the United Kingdom, many by Norman Evan, for the purpose of encouraging adult access to higher education. Like the United States developments, these were mounted by individual educational institutions and were not part of a centralised system.

In the same period (1983), the Scottish Education Department decided to move its vocational education curriculum to one based on clear and explicit learning outcomes, with a criterion-referenced approach to the assessment of these learning outcomes. Accompanying this decision was another to replace their existing course structure (with its year long curriculum assessed typically by an end of year examination) to a modular structure. A one year curriculum was replaced with some 20 modules. These major changes provided ideal conditions for RPL.

"At an early stage in the development, it was realised that if the desired learning was expressed in clear and explicit criterion referenced learning outcome format, learners could be assessed against the expected outcomes as soon as it was apparent that they had met the standards. Achievement of credit would no longer be tied to a fixed period of study. Indeed it was now possible to be assessed against the learning outcomes without attending a single class. Scotland had essentially found its own way to APL" (Simosko, 1991, p.21)

Similar reform of the vocational education system was underway in England. The National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) was established after the release of the 1986 White Paper Working Together - Education and Training. The NCVQ was expected to lead the reform of vocational qualifications which were to be based on nationally recognised standards of competence. The NCVQ had a similar commitment to a unit-based curriculum structure with clear learning outcomes specified for each unit.

The same opportunities for RPL became available in England, and in 1987 the Manpower Services Commission established projects to explore the feasibility of applying the RPL process to the National Vocational Qualifications and their Scottish equivalents. The outcomes of these projects led to the endorsement of the concept of RPL, and the establishment of policies and implementation procedures at the national system level.

In Australia in 1987, Broadmeadows College of TAFE embarked on a joint project with Ford Motor Company and Gordon Technical College. The first RPL "model" was developed and trialled with Ford employees in the areas of electronics and management/supervision. The aim of this project was to develop a "*generally applicable model which established procedures and criteria to recognise:*

- *formal industry training;*

- *work experience; and*

- *life experience."* (Brown, 1992, p.13)

It proved to be a significant development as it enabled Ford's in-house training courses to be linked to TAFE accredited courses in a formal manner. Broadmeadows College of TAFE continued with further case study work to confirm the general applicability of the model across vocational areas.

There are clear signs of the growing acceptance of RPL at a policy level in Australia. The Commonwealth/State resource agreements require provision of RPL services in the TAFE system. The Australian Committee on Training Curriculum (ACTRAC) guide for course accreditation seeks information on proposed RPL arrangements from both public and private training providers in the delivery of the course. State and Territory Ministers responsible for vocational education and training have agreed, under the National Framework for the Recognition of Training, that "... it is essential that training providers have a demonstrated commitment to RPL".

In terms of State/Territory responses, Victoria has moved rapidly. In November 1990 the State Training Board of Victoria endorsed the Broadmeadows RPL Model and, as a first step in implementing RPL throughout Victorian TAFE colleges, supported the training of two staff members from each TAFE college in the methodology. The State Training Board has set a goal for 20 per cent of adult entrants to TAFE colleges to access RPL provisions by 1993. A national training effort was mounted in 1991, with Broadmeadows College of TAFE providing training in RPL for a pool of TAFE staff in each State and Territory. Other States/Territories are at various stages in addressing the policy and implementation issues.

2.2 Application of the Recognition of Prior Learning in Australia

Recognition of prior learning has been seen as a key aspect of the reform of the vocational education and training system and changes in the workplace. Whereas in the United States of America and the United Kingdom its use has been largely restricted to recognition by training providers in terms of individuals securing advanced standing in courses, additional purposes for RPL can be foreshadowed in Australia. This is because of the emerging nexus between vocational education and training, competency standards and industrial award classifications. Thus RPL may prove to be a useful measure, providing for the needs of the present workforce, many of whom have competencies but no corresponding qualifications.

Recognition of prior learning may be an appropriate response for those who:

* have the knowledge and skills to perform their present jobs, but must be aligned in a one-off exercise with award classifications based on competencies;

* need guidance on how to re-enter the workforce, re-skill, gain additional skills or prepare themselves for coming changes in the workplace;

* need encouragement and support to pursue training towards a qualification, or to take up new vocational and training opportunities being created;

* have gained their competencies overseas though training and/or work experience, and face difficulty in having their qualifications or experience recognised; and/or

* may wish to have their present competencies recognised as achievement of part or all of a set of Competency Standards.

The application of RPL for this wider set of purposes, as well as its more conventional application in securing advanced standing in accredited courses, are explored in this report.

2.3 Types of Recognition

At least three different applications for RPL can be identified. These applications are derived from the answer to two questions:

* recognition for what purpose?
* recognition by whom?

RPL is generally seen as conferring "formal" recognition of an individual's skills, knowledge and competency by an external body. It is important to note that sometimes the goal of RPL is a less formal recognition by the individual or the employer of what a person knows and can do.

Such "informal" recognition may serve a self confidence or esteem building function. It may be used to clarify training or career interests and, therefore, play a role in vocational counselling. Informal recognition may also be sought from an employer at the time of a job interview, or when applying for promotion, training opportunities or career development. Much of the value of RPL in this informal sense is recorded in the ABC tapes "Yes, I Can Do That!" The significance of "informal" recognition to the individual should not be ignored in our concentration on the formal application of RPL.

Early moves in the RPL area in the United States of America and in the United Kingdom were mainly directed towards securing access for adults to, and credits within, "recognised" vocational training courses. These moves were characterised by a strong social justice philosophy and a desire to provide encouragement and support for those who had gained little benefit from the education system.

This approach characterised early efforts in Australia by Broadmeadows College of TAFE. Interest in securing access to vocational training courses on a second chance basis will continue to drive the RPL agenda.

In Australia, moves to link award classifications to a worker's possession, acquisition and use of skills, and the need to harness the skills and experience of new arrivals to the country, have highlighted other uses for the RPL process. The reality of multiple purposes for RPL, and of the recognition of RPL outcomes by more than one body, emerged in the study. Three different applications of RPL are described below:

2.3.1 Appropriate placement of an individual in an accredited course or recognised training program

RPL has been most thoroughly documented in the context of an applicant's interest in gaining an educational or vocational qualification. The expectation is that s/he will undertake part of an accredited course offered by a registered training provider. The issue is just how much credit or exemption will be granted by the training provider on the basis of what the applicant already knows and can do.

> *"The type of recognition people receive varies with the context : sometimes it is in the form of credit towards a particular vocational or academic qualification; sometimes it is in the form of exemption from some portion of an educational or training programme; and almost always it is used as a development tool by both the individual undergoing the process and the educational or training providers offering the service".* (Simosko, 1991, p.11)

2.3.2 The right to practise in a regulated occupation and the certification of competency

The right to practise in the trades, declared vocations and other occupations is controlled by State or Territory licensing/registration bodies and professional bodies. For those Australians who have completed the appropriate training and prescribed work experience this is not a problem. There is, however, a sizeable group of skilled and experienced people who have not completed an approved formal training course and/or period of work experience in Australia and must have their skills recognised before they can practise or be employed at an appropriate level. This group includes those who have developed their skills:

* on-the-job in Australia;
* in the Australian defence forces; or
* overseas through formal training courses and/or work experience.

This is a major area of largely unrecognised RPL activity.

2.3.3 Employment-related purposes

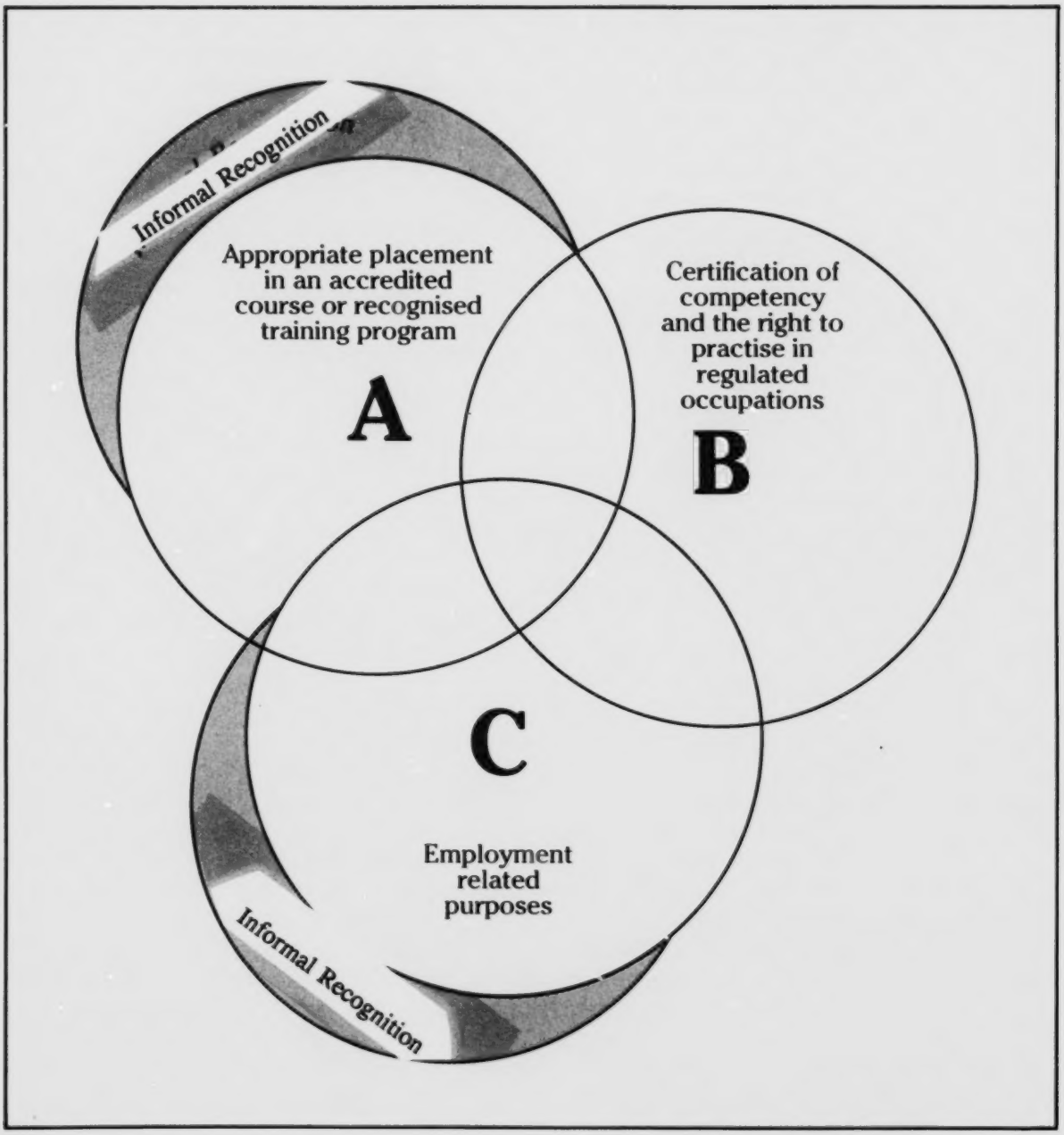
Under the guidance of the National Training Board, industry bodies have embarked on identifying the competencies expected of workers. Sets of competency standards are being developed and endorsed at a national level and will be entered on a national data base.

The RPL process may be a suitable means of assessing and recognising the competencies of employees for the purposes of award classification. The competency standards provide the necessary benchmark, circumventing the need to compare an employee's skills, knowledge or competencies with those gained through a formal training course. This is a particularly useful feature as, in many cases, there is simply no existing training course to act as such a ready benchmark.

Finally, RPL may have a place in the human resource management practices of an organisation. An RPL process could be used for staff recruitment and promotion purposes, and for carrying out skills audits and training needs analysis within an enterprise.

Figure 1

Applications of RPL



2.4 Benefits of the Recognition of Prior Learning

Slowey argues that

"the reasons behind the increasing interest in the development of structures which enable learning based on experience to be assessed and accredited are not hard to find. In principle, there are advantages to all interested parties - the individual, employers, government, providers. Starting with the learners, there is the possibility for them to have their actual levels of knowledge and skill externally recognised, regardless of their level of participation and success within the formal education and training system. Because the emphasis is on outcomes - what someone can do - there is the opportunity for employers to be provided with better information on which to base selection and promotion decisions. For governments, in times of economic downturn and cutbacks in public investment, building on existing levels of competence can assist in avoiding duplication and waste of scarce resources. The avoidance of duplication is also a potential advantage to providers, enabling them to build on what the learner already knows and to focus their attention on new areas of development" (Slowey, 1992, p.63)

The literature and data collected in the study confirm a range of benefits for all parties involved. The key benefits are detailed below.

The recognition of prior learning may, for the **individual:**

* shorten the time required to complete a formal qualification, secure the right to practise in an occupation, or gain a higher classification under an award;

* make entry into formal training more attractive;

* increase learner motivation. The evidence suggests that RPL serves to motivate individuals to further learning and completion of recognised qualifications. It is suggested that the recognition conferred encourages a stronger sense of self confidence and purpose and, overall, is an empowering experience;

* offer cost savings as training will only have to be bought for the additional competencies needed. The benefit extends to employers and government. Other cost and time savings for the individual may also apply - reduced travel costs and time involved in attending training sessions, loss of wages, child care costs, and so on. The individual may become eligible more quickly for promotion as a result of the qualification or skills gained; and

* give substance to social justice principles by providing second chance opportunities for individuals whose initial educational outcomes or decisions to migrate have reinforced their disadvantaged position in the workforce and society.

The recognition of prior learning assists **training providers** to:

* focus on meeting the defined training and development needs of individual students or employees in the light of a clearer definition about what they already know and can do, and what specifically they are seeking or need to learn;

* increase productivity by achieving greater training throughput within current resource levels; and

* develop closer links with industry. This applies particularly to public, private and community-based training providers. Exploration of an applicant's competencies derived from work experience and industry training extends teaching staff's awareness of current practices in the workplace.

The recognition of prior learning may, for **the employer**:

* enable more effective and efficient use to be made of skills already in the workforce. Employer awareness of the full range of skills and knowledge already possessed by their employees may lead to greater use being made of those skills;

* alleviate frustration in having to release staff for study leave purposes when they are merely duplicating learning in order to achieve a credential; and

* accelerate the process of vital skills formation so employees can be fully competent as quickly as possible. RPL is a mechanism for responding to skill shortages and the multiskilling and broadbanding demands of workplace reform by concentrating training efforts on those competencies not yet achieved by employees.

The recognition of prior learning may, for the **community** and the **government** which it represents:

* avoid duplication and waste of scarce training resources by building on, rather than duplicating, the considerable investment in training already made by individuals and enterprises;

* increase productivity and throughput within present resource levels;

* allow more people to access highly competitive training opportunities through the backfilling of places vacated by students/employees granted RPL; and

* provide additional opportunities for access for those previously excluded from access to employment, training and educational opportunities.

The recognition of prior learning may, for **migrants** and the **Australian economy**:

* result in proper utilisation of the skills and qualifications they bring with them to Australia. As the Chairman of the Victorian Migrant Skills Qualifications Board remarked in his foreword to the 1991 Annual Report:

  "An estimated 450,000 of the post-war migrants in Australia have work skills and qualifications unused or significantly under-utilised. The cost of this wasted skill-base to the economy is about $1 billion in lost productivity each year. To the individuals concerned, the cost is immense frustration and disillusionment"; and

* result in profound social benefits to the immigrant and his/her family in terms of emotional health and happiness, commitment to the new country, on-going vocational development - all of which are associated with the recognition and use of competencies gained overseas at some cost.

3. KEY IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

Recognition of prior learning is an evolving concept - one that is being tested in practice and modified in the light of experience. The Agreement for a National Framework for the Recognition of Training (NFROT) brings a sense of added urgency to the debate and the implementation of RPL in Australia's vocational education and training system. This section seeks to provide reference points for the consideration of RPL by discussing the key issues to be addressed by those responsible for the implementation of RPL services.

3.1 Principle Underlying the Recognition of Prior Learning

The NFROT Agreement lists five key principles for the RPL process. A key one of these is an acceptance that an individual may gain knowledge and skills (or competencies) from many sources. It is not important where or how or when or even why these competencies were gained - what is important is the acknowledgment that the individual has achieved the same outcomes or competencies as would be expected if s/he had followed the more usual training path. RPL is a process which enables the applicant to demonstrate his or her achievement of these competencies.

Competencies may be derived from many sources:

* work experience;
* life experience;
* training programs offered by industry, private or community-based providers which have not been formally recognised;
* training programs undertaken overseas (which may or may not be accredited in that country);
* informal learning programs; and/or
* recognised courses and training programs.

3.2 A Resource Efficient Approach to the Recognition of Prior Learning

It is worth reflecting briefly on the imperfect assessment arrangements prevailing for students undertaking formal studies. RPL is often seen as involving "second rate" assessment, but the critic has set up in his/her mind an idealised assessment situation which is rarely met in reality.

Conventional assessment has a number of obvious weaknesses. The full range of skills and knowledge covered in the subject or unit is not tested but, rather, a sample is assessed. There is frequently a limited number of assessment events (an assignment or two, a multiple-choice theory test and short practical test would be a fairly typical arrangement).

The evidence from many quarters confirms that RPL applicants are likely to underestimate their skills (competencies) and as a result seek less recognition than they might otherwise be granted. This is partly due to the fear of failure and the belief that they might lack something critical. In a training context there is the additional factor that many students feel that, in gaining exemption, they may miss out on something vital in the more formal education system.

It is important to achieve a balance between assessment and resource efficiency. The "risk management" model shown in Figure 2 establishes a connection between the level of risk and the extent of recognition sought. Thus, a high level of risk applies when full recognition is sought through the granting of a qualification or acknowledgment of competent status. A much lower level of risk applies when partial recognition is sought for individual subjects/units/competencies.

The level of risk relates to the system of safety nets in place. These safety nets represent the opportunities the assessor has to:

* specify further training and/or experience the applicant must gain;

* conduct assessments at a later time in relation to subsequent training or work experience stipulated; and

* revoke "provisional recognition status".

Thus, claims for recognition for a few units, subjects or Units of Competency represent low risk situations because further training and, by extension, further assessment will be required. Unmerited recognition will probably lead to subsequent failure as it does currently with mainstream students.

Claims for full recognition, on the other hand, represent high risk situations. No further training or experience is involved and, therefore, this assessment decision is binding.

The "risk management" approach proposes an increasing degree of rigour required as the level of risk increases. The rigour is in two forms - the amount and quality of evidence required and the involvement of more assessors to review that evidence and make the final assessment decision.

Accordingly, in a low risk situation, the assessment decision could be taken by a subject expert on evidence provided by the applicant in his/her application form, supplemented by an interview.

As the risk level rises, additional evidence should be gathered. This evidence could take a variety of forms - a workplace observation, challenge or trade test, confirmation of competency by supervisor or employer, assignments, portfolio of finished work, further oral questioning. The use of a panel to review the evidence brings a wider range of views to the assessment decision leading to a greater degree of confidence. (See Figure 2)

When considering the "risk management" approach to RPL being proposed, however, a number of considerations need to be borne in mind:

* The "risk management" concept could be interpreted as assuming that all competencies and modules are arranged and delivered in a linear, hierarchical way progressing from the easiest to the hardest and that all areas of competence will be assessed at a later stage of the course (the "safety net"). This is not always true. For example, in the "low risk" RPL process, if you exempt a person from an Occupational Health and Safety module, the course may not be organised to allow further assessement of Occupational Health and Safety before the credential is awarded.

* It should be recognised that some competencies or modules may be more important or critical than others. The person may only be applying for recognition of 10 per cent of the course, but it may be the most critical 10 per cent of the whole course and deserving of rigorous assessment.

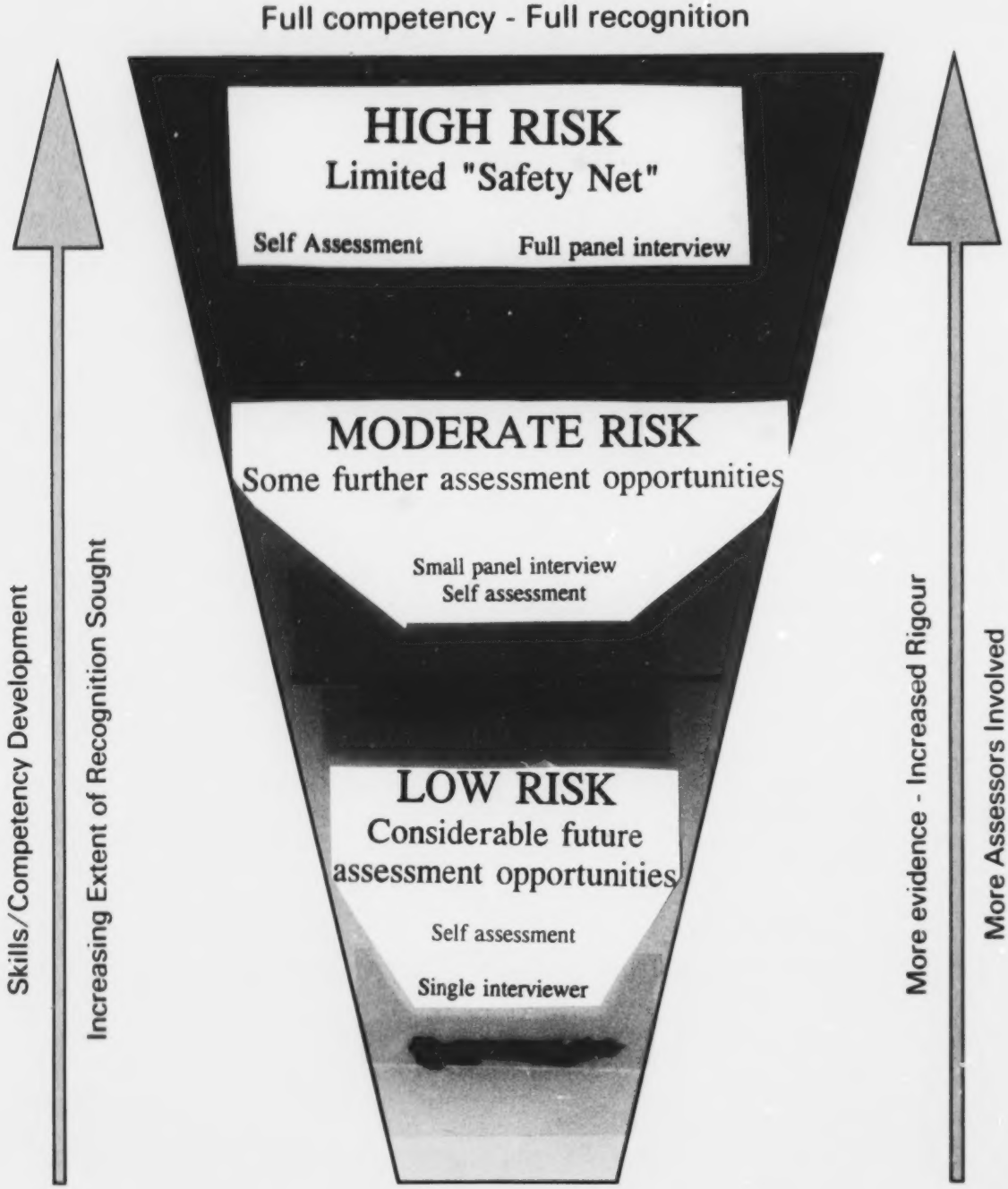
* The "risk management" approach is more focused on the educational application of RPL and an administrative approach which encourages people to apply for credit for proportions of a course/credential. It does not readily cater for the "full credential" type of RPL, where it will be a matter of course that people apply for 100 per cent recognition.

The amount of risk is directly and positively related to:

* the amount of evidence to be collected;
* the degree of rigour required in the RPL assessment process;
* the number of assessors to be used in the assessment process; and
* the costs of implementing RPL processes.

Figure 2

A RESOURCE EFFICIENT, RISK MANAGEMENT APPROACH FOR RPL



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3.3 Different Approaches for Different Operating Environments

There is a perception that there is only one "endorsed" approach to RPL, namely, the Broadmeadows College RPL model. A number of RPL service providers seemed somewhat apologetic that their arrangement departed from the "Broadmeadows' Model".

The appendices to this Report document 16 RPL arrangements, identified through the study. All of these arrangements differ, in subtle or marked ways from the Broadmeadows approach to RPL. This is because the arrangements need to take in account:

* the operating environment (sensitivities, resource or time constraints, volume of applications expected, and so on); and

* the perception of risk about the effect of an inaccurate assessment.

3.4 Other Implementation Issues

3.4.1 Attitudinal barriers

Attitudinal barriers need to be addressed in the RPL arrangement adopted. The RPL arrangement needs to give priority to communication and to securing union, management and employee support within industry arrangements.

The benefits to employees/applicants must be demonstrable. Concerns about the subjectivity in assessment need to be addressed through the provision of training for assessors and clear assessment criteria or standards. Credible and acceptable individuals, or panels, need to be chosen and trained as assessors in the workplace or for other assessment settings. The development of competency standards for assessors which is occurring at present, will provide a good, consistent basis for such training. Appeal processes need to be instituted. Finally, organisations need to market the new training and RPL arrangements to employees, students or other potential applicants.

3.4.2 The costs of the recognition of prior learning

To achieve the considerable benefits that can be derived from RPL, there will be costs. The direct costs associated with the establishment of RPL were readily identified by respondents in the study. At this early stage, when arrangements are still being implemented, streamlined or extended, it is harder to estimate ongoing costs.

What has received little attention or recognition is the opportunity cost of failing to provide RPL. Goode made this point in relation to the TAFE system. *"To a TAFE system committed to maximising the use of its scarce resources, not recognising prior learning and, thus, requiring students to start below their level of competence, is wasteful. Unfortunately, this cost is not obvious and receives little attention from TAFE and administrations. Recognition of prior learning is essential to an efficient TAFE".* (Goode, 1991, p.1). The true costs of RPL cannot be properly examined until these opportunity costs are brought into the equation.

The direct start-up costs are reported by many respondents to be:

* time spent in policy development and program design;

* time spent in establishing assessment criteria, that is, in developing competency standards (if these do not exist) or learning outcomes with associated performance criteria;

* time spent in developing assessment approaches or methods such as the use of checklists (for self assessment and for use by assessors), key interview questions, practical or challenge tests, computer-based tests, video clips to stimulate and focus oral questioning, and so on;

* time spent in the preparation of resource materials (statements of learning outcomes), information and promotion materials (brochures, leaflets, posters), process materials (application forms, proformas for recording assessment decisions) and record keeping systems (data bases, career portfolios, skills passports);

* printing or purchasing costs associated with the above; and

* cost of training staff in competency-based assessment and RPL processes in particular (fees for training provided, lost productive capacity, staff replacement costs).

Many respondents recognise that many of these costs cannot be properly charged to RPL. Most are inherent cost items applying to training or licensing and would normally be absorbed in a general training or licensing budget. It was felt by some that the advent of RPL provided justification for seeking special funds to cover normal mainstream requirements.

Ongoing operating costs are reported as being the costs of:

* time spent in managing the system;

* time spent in promoting and marketing the provision, responding to requests for information and general enquires, despatching materials and so on;

* time spent in counselling applicants prior to, and after, assessment;

* time spent in actual assessment and recording outcomes; and

* securing suitable premises for office operations and assessment facilities if assessment can not take place in the candidate's workplace.

The present discussion on costs is clouded by other factors. The three main factors are the assessment approach employed, the availability of benchmarks for judgement and the lack of prototype materials.

It is worth noting that these costs will be influenced by whether economies of scale are possible. Proliferation of schemes across States, colleges, organisations, enterprises and industries will reduce the extent to which set-up costs can be defrayed across a large number of applicants. Operating costs will also be significantly influenced by the processes employed. It would seem premature to finalise policies on fees and charges for RPL until some of the cost/benefit parameters are clear.

3.4.3 Recognition mechanisms

Removed from the training context, the recognition mechanisms are more elusive. In the study, the mechanisms to handle skills/competency recognition revealed various permutations and combinations of two sets of factors. The factors were - national versus State; government-driven and operated versus industry-driven and operated. The major programs investigated were:

TRRA - a national system for a defined set of trades (metal and electrical) operated by the Federal Government

ACCESS - a national system for occupations in the hospitality industry operated by an industry training body.

ACT Skills Recognition Service - an ACT system for certain trades operated by the ACT.

Building Services Corporation - a State-based system for building trades operated by the NSW State Government.

If the recognition mechanisms in traditional trades areas are unclear for many applicants, the position becomes more confusing in non-regulated occupations. For example, there are no recognition mechanisms at present for clerks who may wish to have their competencies recognised - not in terms of some accredited course which they have no intention of doing -in terms of the competency standards when these are endorsed. Recognition mechanisms, in many cases, simply do not exist and there were no obvious plans about how to deal with such cases.

It would be appropriate for further investigations to be undertaken to develop strategies for skill/competency recognition.

4. BEST PRACTICE IN THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

This section discusses the good practices identified during the course of the study. The criteria for good practice are, firstly, consistency with the Principles in the NFROT Agreement and, secondly, fitness for purpose.

The approach taken in the study was to extract features noted in the present RPL arrangements and build a composite picture of good practice as it currently exists in Australia. Good practice is identified in relation to each stage of the RPL process. This picture of good practice will be of use to practitioners and organisations planning to implement an RPL service. (Details of the RPL case studies conducted are included in Appendices 1 to 4.)

4.1 Information Stage

The first stage in the recognition of prior learning should be the information stage. The objectives of this stage are to let people know the service exists, to attract potential candidates and to provide sufficient information to help them decide whether or not to seek recognition. The features of a well-designed service include:

* a marketing plan for selected target groups (e.g. individuals, unqualified people working in a particular industry, employees, special needs groups, enterprises, unions, community agencies);

* marketing efforts (press releases, visits/addresses to groups, community organisations and companies, work site visits, letters to employees, articles in company and industry magazines, posters in Commonwealth Employment Service offices, articles in local, ethnic or trade newspapers, radio/television items);

* provision of clear, simple information covering:

  - what is involved;
  - advice and support which is available for those who require help;
  - qualifications or courses for which RPL may be granted;
  - costs and fees (if applicable); and
  - the typical time frame for recognition.

* readily available written material which is attractive (free of jargon and eye catching). If the target groups include a high proportion of non-English speaking people, key documents need to be available in languages other than English; and

* point of contact staff equipped to provide information and referrals (including switchboard operator, receptionist, workplace supervisors, teaching/training staff, office staff) and ideally promotional material which clearly identifies a person to contact for further information.

4.2 Initial Support and Counselling Stage

The objectives of this stage are to assist candidates to clarify their expectations in seeking RPL, to identify a suitable course or qualification and to consider what they know and can do in relation to the benchmarks which will be applied in the assessment stage. The features of a well-designed service include:

* provision of an information/briefing session held at a convenient time for candidates. These sessions may be held as individual interviews or small group sessions;

* efforts to create an inviting and comfortable environment;

* an opportunity for candidates to clarify their objectives and express their fears in an individual interview or group session;

* guidance and support, if required, from a skilled member of staff with a sound knowledge of:

  - training programs, courses or qualifications on offer; and
  - competency standards or learning outcomes applying to each course or qualification on offer; and

* a written statement of specific standards or learning outcomes for each course or training program, or the standards required for certification, which the candidate can use.

4.3 Application Stage

The objective of this stage is for candidates to document their claim for competency in sufficient detail to help the assessor reach an assessment decision. This requires the candidate to identify how s/he can best prove competency or claim credit, to select and organise evidence which will be acceptable and complete and submit his/her application.

The features of a well designed service include:

* provision of competency standards or learning outcomes with performance criteria to guide the candidate in preparing his/her claim;

* self-assessment opportunities (e.g. checklists, key questions, computer-generated self- tests) based on competency standards or learning outcomes to help the candidate determine whether s/he has reached the standard;

* application forms which are user-friendly, in plain English and designed to assist the candidate organise his/her evidence in relation to specific competency standards, skills or learning outcomes;

* guidelines for the candidate's use suggesting possible sources of evidence, the need to authenticate evidence and confirm the currency of skills and competencies claimed;

* opportunities for further support from a trained member of staff, if required, in completing the application form and any matters associated with the assessment process;

* the ability to obtain "top up", or gain refresher or additional learning prior to assessment. Some RPL services note that, while many applicants were able to collect evidence of competency, some lacked part of the theoretical base normally included in formal training courses or were uncertain about the standard expected. Their response to this client need was to arrange access to special "topping up" classes, learning guides or distance education material for these candidates. The candidates then undertook to gain the necessary knowledge before the assessment was conducted; and

* an opportunity for the candidate to negotiate the form of assessment. The assessment options are discussed with the candidate and agreement is reached on the method of assessment. In some cases, RPL practitioners noted that it was very difficult or time consuming for a candidate to obtain sufficient evidence of prior achievement . The options of being assessed through an interview situation, of taking performance and/or knowledge tests or of being tested in the candidate's workplace are discussed and the preferred assessment method is negotiated.

4.4 Assessment Stage

The objective of this stage is for the assessor to determine, through a systematic review of evidence, whether the candidate can demonstrate achievement of the competencies or learning outcomes. The features of a well-designed service include:

* assessors who are familiar with their field; the standards that relate to the occupation or area of study they are assessing; RPL assessment methods and procedures; and have reasonably effective communication and questioning skills;

* a flexible and responsive attitude on the assessor's part as to what constitutes acceptable evidence;

* commitment to explicit competency standards or learning outcomes as the full and proper basis for assessment decisions;

* adoption of cost- and time-effective methods which are appropriate to the level of risk involved and the amount of assessment rigor necessary. Over-assessment in low risk situations may satisfy the assessor but the resource implications may limit the organisation's ability to offer the service widely.

Decisions to move to "second-stage assessment" increase costs. The decision to incur extra assessment costs by seeking further evidence not readily available, is made in the light of full consideration of the level of risk and the degree of assessment rigour needed; and

* a systematic review of the evidence, including that provided in the application form and that gathered through the interview/workplace assessment/performance tests and so on. This systematic review considers the evidence in terms of its authenticity, validity, relevance to the learning outcomes or standards, currency and variety.

4.5 Post-Assessment Guidance Stage

The objectives of this stage are two-fold. The first is to encourage the candidate to reflect on the RPL outcomes and set further learning and development targets.

The second is to enable the organisation to obtain client feedback about the RPL process itself and ways to improve the service. The features of a well-designed service include:

* clear, prompt and constructive feedback to the candidate which promotes, rather than undermines, the development of the candidate;

* a review period with the assessor for both successful and unsuccessful candidates in order to

  - prepare a learning/development plan. For those who have not yet reached the required standard, advice is given on ways to improve performance or gain the necessary skills or knowledge; and

  - seek feedback (formally or informally) from the candidate or the process they have been through; and

* unsuccessful candidates being informed about appeals provisions. The evidence from the case studies suggests that appeals are rarely lodged if the assessment criteria are clear, if the process is fair and if post-assessment counselling is provided. An appeal provision is, however, a safeguard in the system and demonstrates commitment to fairness.

Follow-up studies which track the candidate's subsequent success in the job, course or training program (longitudinal studies) are very desirable but not essential.

4.6 Certification Stage

The objective of this stage is the awarding of credit or recognising the positive outcomes of assessment. It may take the form of a notation on the student record or skills passport, the issuing of a credential, or entry of results on an industry data base.

The features of a well-designed service include:

* a stream-lined reporting system, involving the minimum of paper work, which enables the assessor to:

  - record the evidence considered;
  - record the competencies or learning outcomes confirmed; and
  - provide sufficient summary evidence for third parties (e.g. registrars) and those who may have to handle appeals;

* a robust record keeping system which provides the candidate with:

  - prompt, official notification of RPL results; and
  - updates on progress on request;

* prompt action by administrative staff to complete the documentation and records required by the organisation and provide the candidate with official notification of results; and

* a standardised reporting of RPL results which does not marginalise outcomes achieved through the RPL process and yet allows the organisation to monitor the use, and outcomes, of the RPL service.

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APPENDIX 1

The Application of RPL for Appropriate Placement of Students in Accredited Courses by TAFE

1.1 Introduction

The concept of RPL is not a new phenomenon for TAFE. Under longstanding provisions for status/exemption/credit, such recognition has been given to student applicants at TAFE colleges for some time.

The observations made by Goode about the use and characteristics of these procedures in Western Australia, would seem to apply elsewhere across the TAFE sector in Australia.

> ". *They are student initiated. If the student does not apply, then no exemption is given despite the fact that granting an exemption represents a saving of resources to the institution.*
>
> . *The system is crude. Exemptions are usually given on a whole subject basis.*
>
> . *The process is adversarial. The student is out to beat the system while the institution believes it is defending its standards.*
>
> . *Written credentials are usually the only form of evidence that is accepted.*
>
> . *The process is usually slow and bureaucratic." (1)*

The exemptions are mostly granted on the basis of completion of other formal study although the procedures do not prohibit exemptions being granted on other grounds. These cases are often referred to as "non-standard exemptions" but the onus and burden of proof is on the applicant.

The status/exemption procedures are considered to have deficiencies. They do not satisfy the criteria of commitment, access, fairness and support embodied in the NFROT Agreement, nor do they enhance appropriate placement of an applicant in a course.

Furthermore, as TAFE colleges, or sections within TAFE colleges, enter into co-operative training relationships with industry and take on a client service orientation, the exemptions approach becomes increasingly untenable.

The promotion of RPL by Broadmeadows College of TAFE has served to give greater credence to skills and competencies gained outside educational institutions and encouraged a broader view of the sources of competency and evidence that could be used to support claims. It also addressed many deficiencies of the exemptions approach outlined above.

State/Territory TAFE and training authorities are responding to the challenge of RPL contained in the NFROT Agreement. Rather than overhauling the existing exemptions policies to reflect new views on what constitutes appropriate grounds for exemption, they have seen RPL as a new demand requiring a new policy and procedures.

Thus, new RPL policies and procedures have been developed, or are in the process of being developed in South Australia, Tasmania, ACT, Western Australia and Queensland. In some cases it is the Training Authority (e.g. SESDA in WA, VETEC in Queensland or STB in Victoria) rather than the TAFE system which is responsible for this policy work.

1.2 Case Studies in the Implementation of RPL in TAFE Colleges

Information was obtained from a number of colleges currently offering or planning soon to offer, RPL to enrolling students. Case studies have been selected for:

- Centre for Flexible Learning, Great Southern Regional College of TAFE - WA
- Broadmeadows College of TAFE - Vic
- Community Services School, Noarlunga College of TAFE - SA
- Holmesglen College of TAFE - Vic
- Gilles Plains College of TAFE, Horticultural School - SA

Details of these case studies are set out in tables at the end of this chapter.

In addition to the case studies presented in this section, valuable information was provided by staff of the following colleges:

Box Hill College of TAFE
ACT Institute of TAFE
Northern Territory Rural College
Northern Territory Open College of TAFE
Regency College of TAFE- Hotel School, SA
Northern Metropolitan College of TAFE -Balga Campus, WA
Southern East Metropolitan College of TAFE
Northern Territory University - Institute of TAFE

Interviews were held with a number of other key TAFE personnel to provide information on some of the planning and policy aspects. A considerable number of reports, manuals and material was collected and reviewed on developments in RPL. The following five case studies illustrate the diversity of approaches to RPL within individual TAFE colleges.

1.3 Centre for Flexible Learning, Greater Southern Regional College of TAFE, Western Australia

This case study illustrates the use of RPL in an open learning situation. The Centre's courses are developed in a modular format based on unofficial competency standards set by industry. The Centre offers certain courses in full and others in part, but does not offer trade courses.

The Director noted that the introduction of flexible delivery formats in Semester 1, 1992 meant that it *"was necessary to provide for RPL to minimise unnecessary resource duplication. Since the RPL process is tied to flexible delivery, all modules allow students to self assess their starting points with lecturer counselling. Provide RPL in conjunction with flexible learning and the operation is trivial"*

The Centre for Flexible Learning sees itself as providing improved access and equity for most traditionally disadvantaged groups. It has cultivated a wide range of community agencies and contacts to promote its learning opportunities. Since the introduction of flexible learning there has been a dramatic expansion of enrolments.

1.4 Broadmeadows College of TAFE, Victoria

Broadmeadows has had a major influence in promoting RPL in Australia and bringing the matter on to the national training reform agenda. Broadmeadows College has exercised a high profile role in the provision and dissemination of resources and materials and in the provision of training for TAFE staff and staff from other organisations including the universities, a range of companies and community-based organisations like Skill Share. From this influential position, Broadmeadows College has, to a great extent, framed the discussion about RPL and its implementation in Australia.

The College's involvement began in 1989 while working with the Ford Motor Company, its employees and the unions in the Ford/TAFE Articulation Project. More information on the project may be found in the Ford case study.

Since 1991, the Recognition and Assessment Centre within the College has been funded to function *"as a State centre for RPL with responsibilities for supporting the Victorian State Training system in the implementation of RPL. Support provided to the System has included:*

* *Invitation of RPL policies;*
* *Provision of RPL consultancy services;*
* *Development of other projects related to RPL which broaden its application;*
* *Collection and promotion of elements of 'Best Practice' in the application of RPL;*
* *Collection and dissemination of resources for the implementation of RPL" (2)*

The Recognition and Assessment Centre has designed and conducted training programs of three days' duration for RPL assessors. Employing the train-the-trainer approach, a further day has been added to the basic training to allow RPL assessors to qualify as "senior RPL consultants", able to provide training for others. Training manuals have been prepared for "senior RPL consultants" to support their training efforts. In the period of July-December 1991 the Centre trained 244 consultants from State and Territory TAFE system. This created a pool of expertise, and a national network of RPL assessors across the TAFE system has been formed. Completion of training and certification is dependent on the consultant finalising three case studies (i.e. RPL assessments) in their own institutional setting. The RPL training is also offered to industry and individual companies on a fee-for-service basis.

The Centre has also been funded for a number of projects to explore the application of RPL in various settings.

These projects include:

. National Plan of Action for Women in TAFE - Implications for Women and RPL Resource Kits;
. Training Resource Manual for Support Workers/Advocates;
. National Staff Development;
. Work-Based Assessment; and
. Investigation of the Implementation of RPL in TAFE.

1.5 Community Services School, Noarlunga College of TAFE, South Australia

The shortfall between the number of trained child care workers graduating from TAFE colleges in South Australia and the needs of the child care industry became of increasing concern in the late 1980's.

In 1987/88 during the review of the Advanced Certificate in Child Care, it was decided that *"where they could demonstrate the required competencies in specific sections of the course, applicants could claim status or credit for knowledge and skills gained experientially"*. The Department of Employment, Education and Training agreed to fund a national pilot project which would develop an assessment process and tools to recognise the competencies of untrained child care workers who seek admission to the Advanced Certificate in Child Care course. This was the origin of Noarlunga College's interest in offering RPL to its students and its approach is modelled quite substantially on the Broadmeadows College approach.

The starting point for Noarlunga College was to identify the required competencies and convert these into learning outcomes with performance criteria for each module. The RPL Co-ordinator believes that the open process they have followed has contributed greatly to acceptance of the RPL process. They have used a working party of key stakeholders as a means of gaining support, validating activities and approaches and keeping people informed.

There are a number of interesting outcomes from the work Noarlunga College has completed to date. A Manual of Procedures for Recognition of Prior Learning has been produced, complete with material of value to other TAFE staff (Application Form, other processing proformas, and a variety of assessment tools - sample interview questions, field assessment checklists, video clips to stimulate guided discussion in the interview).

The project has sought to have an impact on mainstream activities in the community services field and in the College. A major training effort for College and School has been mounted. The course advisors have been given information sessions on RPL and the Co-ordinator attends meetings regularly and provides reports on progress.

Cost effective methods of disseminating RPL information to potential applicants are now being explored. This was the impetus for the three group information sessions held six weeks before classes begin and the use of student self-assessment to determine whether to seek RPL for particular modules. The use of student services staff to assist in the information and application stage is currently being explored. The issue of scheduling RPL assessment before classes are finalised, is being handled by conducting information sessions six weeks before commencement of training. Other streamlining methods are also being tested.

The Noarlunga RPL project has now moved beyond its pilot phase and gained acceptance as a normal feature of the training arrangement. An evaluation of the project has been conducted by Carol Ward of SADETAFE.

1.6 Holmesglen College of TAFE, Victoria

This College has used two approaches to the recognition of prior learning. With its adult apprentices in carpentry, it has used the existing credit/exemption procedures for a number of years, but in 1991 it piloted the use of the Broadmeadows College RPL model for recognising the skills and competencies of non-teaching staff.

In the 1991 pilot, fourteen non-teaching staff applied for recognition in a range of TAFE courses. The Broadmeadows College approach was followed and the assessors received three days training in RPL. Observations made by the RPL assessors as a consequence of the process were that the applicants underestimated their skills, possessed a very high level of skills, were granted RPL in almost all the subjects they applied for and were often granted RPL for subjects they did not apply for. This pilot project found that the RPL assessor required an average of 4.3 hours to complete one assessment.

A different approach is taken with the adult apprentices in carpentry. Large numbers of experienced workers in the building industry without formal qualifications enrol in this training program. The program is offered on Friday evenings and Saturdays.

The College expects the applicant to take the initiative in seeking credit but the credit provisions are widely known. The student, therefore, completes the application form identifying from the curriculum document those modules which s/he believes s/he can do. Assistance can be sought from student services officers or departmental staff. All adult apprentices are given a diagnostic test and interview. The applicant's word is largely accepted as defining a suitable starting point in the course, but they are advised that it is not in their interest to overestimate their competencies. Candidates are told that credit granted for a subject will be revoked if they do not pass the next subject in sequence.

1.7 Horticultural School, State Horticultural Centre, Gilles Plains College of TAFE, South Australia

In mid 1991, the School decided that it needed to be more pro-active in recognising the considerable experience possessed by many of the employees of its clients. These employees frequently had no credentials and wanted to be accommodated within emerging awards. The School decided it needed to be better prepared to respond to the new award arrangements in the amenity horticulture industry.

The Broadmeadows College model seemed to offer a suitable avenue, and training in RPL was arranged for about half the School staff. The School describes its approach as "diminished adherence" to the Broadmeadows College model. The use of two person panels, and the possibility of including a support person for the candidate is only employed if the lecturer finds difficulty in reaching a decision on credit or if the applicant disputes the lecturer's initial decision.

Availability of RPL is thoroughly canvassed in information sessions before course selection. Each course applicant has an appointment with a lecturer. In this interview the lecturer explores the credit a student may seek in relation to the curriculum document and its learning outcomes. As part of the process of determining a suitable program for the student, the lecturer decides a suitable starting point and therefore probable credit. If the applicant gains entry into the course, the credit arrangements and program are formalised. The School regards this as a normal part of its pastoral care and student educational counselling functions.

No fees or charges are made but the student contact hours of subjects credited are recorded. This is regarded as recognising that greater productivity and throughput of students is achieved.

The response from industry to this arrangement has been very positive. The School is now working on customised training for some employers. Under this arrangement, RPL is negotiated for the individual employee. The employer pays for the additional training required by its employees. It was felt that this approach would fit in well with emerging award classifications. The School is also exploring providing an RPL service as a recognition body.

1.8 Issues Raised by Respondents

The five case studies reveal that two quite different sets of arrangements have been developed for the recognition of prior learning in the TAFE sector. The first arrangement is based on the Broadmeadows College RPL model, the other approach is based on a more proactive use of existing credit/exemption procedures. Many of the issues raised apply only to the Broadmeadows College model and have no particular relevance to the other approach.

1.8.1 Exposure to industry and award considerations

Noarlunga, Holmesglen and Gilles Plains college case studies are closely connected with their industries (child care, building and local government industries respectively). They have followed the progress of negotiation of new awards, classification systems and career paths. A high proportion of their students are working in the industry (all in Holmesglen's adult apprentice program) with considerable experience and well-developed skills.

The colleges appreciate the need to recognise skills already possessed and to ensure that any additional training provided is really required. Neither the employer nor the student is interested in duplicating training or prolonging the period of training before a credential can be issued.

1.8.2 Confidence vested in RPL applicants

In the case of the Centre for Flexible Learning, Holmesglen and Gilles Plains colleges, decisions about RPL are made in the context of an applicant knowing what skills or competencies they are trying to gain. RPL becomes part of the initial course counselling to determine his/her learning needs and, with guidance from staff about what is involved in the various units of the course, the student can select or negotiate an appropriate starting point. Perhaps this is because both Holmesglen and Gilles Plains colleges are offering RPL mainly to experienced workers employed in the industry whereas the other colleges are dealing with less experienced people, many of whom have more limited work experience in the industry.

The key issues raised by case study respondents from the Centre for Flexible Learning, Holmesglen and Gilles Plains colleges include:

1.8.3 Use of a single assessor instead of a panel

The significant costs associated with RPL have been overcome by using a single assessor rather than a panel of a subject expert and an RPL expert.

1.8.4 "RPL is nothing special but an integral part of business"

For these respondents, RPL is not an issue but rather a part of the normal operations of the whole program. Their handling of RPL is low key and the debate about RPL is rather puzzling. From this position flows their opposition to fees and charges for RPL and to regarding RPL assessment activity as anything other than a normal part of teaching duties.

The key issues raised by Broadmeadows and Noarlunga colleges were the ones typically cited in reports and discussions with other TAFE staff.

1.8.5 Fees and charges

The issue of fees and charges was a difficult issue and a matter seen as requiring urgent resolution. Where fees were being charged, these fees did not cover the full assessment costs involved. Broadmeadows college has developed a position paper on fees which is currently under consideration by the Victorian State Training Board.

1.8.6 Teaching functions and RPL assessments

The view is held that conducting RPL assessment is an additional work load factor for teachers. It entails both preparation for the interview and the interview time of several teaching staff. As such, the time commitment for RPL assessments must be regarded as "teaching duties" rather than as "incidental duties/associated functions". The respondents are seeking to have this recognised in their respective teacher awards.

Other key issues reported by respondents, regardless of the RPL approach used, were:

1.8.7 Need for faster progress in competency standards work

Virtually all respondents acknowledged how important it was to have endorsed industry competency standards. With competency standards in place, RPL becomes quite straightforward. In the absence of industry endorsed standards, these respondents were working to informal competency standards, but these did not have the same credibility.

1.8.8 Importance of the curriculum documents

They noted the difficulties presented for RPL if the curriculum failed to provide clear criteria (learning outcomes and performance criteria) against which firstly, the applicant can determine whether to apply for exemption or not and, secondly, staff can determine whether the applicant is competent or not. Courses written in a different format were not suited to RPL, without major interpretation by staff.

RPL was made easier and fairer if the curriculum was in modular format with each module of a relatively short nature. It was more practical to grant recognition for small modules than to provide full recognition for a subject in which students were unlikely to be able to demonstrate competency across all learning outcomes.

1.8.9 "Unfriendly curriculum documents"

Holmesglen College commented that "unfriendly curriculum documents" were difficult for students to interpret. Such documents made it hard for them to decide whether their experience and knowledge was sufficient or not. The present documentation tended to turn people away from applying for RPL.

1.8.10 Course delivery issues

"Self-paced programs readily accommodate RPL as they enable individualised delivery of training at the pace determined by the student. However, the responsiveness of self-paced curriculum to RPL does not imply that all curriculum should be self-paced in order to accommodate RPL. Adult learners respond to a variety of learning and delivery styles and should not be restricted to a single mode of delivery" (3). It was noted by respondents that RPL puts pressure on colleges

using conventional classroom teaching in terms of the timing of course selection, RPL processing, class formation and the construction of timetables.

1.8.11 Staff development

Respondents referred to the need for both increased interpersonal skill development, as well as skills in counselling students on appropriate training programs and entry point for students. In arrangements relying on a single person (the subject expert) to make assessment decisions, the respondents wanted this person to be trained in RPL processes so that their decisions were defensible. For Broadmeadows and Noarlunga colleges, the presence of an RPL expert on the panel is an essential component of the quality assurance process.

1.8.12 Timing of RPL assessments and its impact on class formation and backfilling of student places

The period before classes begin is a busy one for staff as it includes course selection, enrolment of students and class formation. To add RPL claim processing at this time causes severe stress to the system.

In the case studies where continuous enroiment occurs this is less of a problem. In a traditional lockstep class setting, unless RPL is dealt with before classes are formed, opportunities to backfill vacancies in classes through second round offers are missed. This means that the possibility of increasing student throughput is lost. Furthermore, students granted RPL may lose the fast tracking advantage if they, in turn, cannot immediately join higher level classes and have to wait until the next semester or year to continue their studies.

1.8.13 "Mind set change"

Several respondents raised the point that RPL demands a change in a teacher's outlook. From their perspective, this was the single most important factor holding back the adoption of RPL in TAFE colleges.

One respondent referred to it as a *"mind set change"*. Another described it as a process of *"letting go - letting go of notions of being the expert and taking on the role of facilitator, letting go of notions that expertise is best gained in an academic setting and recognising instead the value of other sources of knowledge and skill."*

1.8.14 Desire to share approaches, experiences and materials

Many of the respondents felt isolated in their system and unable to keep abreast of developments. They were intensely interested in learning from others - in sharing approaches, ways of handling implementation issues, assessment methods, and materials such as manuals of procedures, application forms, booklets and process forms.

1.8.15 Measuring institutional efficiency and productivity

TAFE colleges were uncertain about whether to record full program hours (known as student contact hours) that have been exempted through RPL assessments or not. Practices in this regard varied. At present, student contact hours, rather than student throughput is seen as the principal measure of institutional efficiency. Unless hours exempted through the RPL process are included in the student contact hours count, they feel that offering RPL reduces their perceived productivity. The importance of student contact hours on funding levels reinforced their interest in including exempted student contact hours.

1.8.16 Recording of RPL outcomes

There is debate about how to record subject/modules granted in the RPL process. Practices varied - some colleges record "pass", others "status", others "competent". There was concern that the recording approach should not disadvantage students.

1.8.17 A prescriptive approach

Some respondents sought decisions at a State/Territory level on many of the matters raised above. They felt they were acting in a policy and procedural vacuum. They wanted agreement on a standardised model, fees and charges, limits on credit and so on.

Other respondents did not see the need for endorsement of a particular model or formulation of procedures binding on everyone. They feared this outcome, believing that such moves would limit the necessary freedom to tailor approaches to their particular operating environments.

1.9 References

1. Goode, T. *Recognition of Prior Learning and TAFE Curriculum: A Discussion Paper*, p.5

2. Broadmeadows College of TAFE, *Final Report and Discussion Paper: Recognition of Prior Learning Implementation Project*, p15

3. Ibid. p.29

ORGANISATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

Organisation	Authorisation/ Mandate	Management Arrangements and Staffing	Training for Advisers/Assessors	Resourcing (set-up/ongoing)
Centre for Flexible Learning, Great Southern Regional College of TAFE - WA	Inherent feature of flexible delivery format introduced in Semester 1, 1992	RPL is managed by "facilitators" (ie staff) at the Centre as a normal part of the process of determining an appropriate training program and starting point for a student.	RPL is implicit in structured working guides and all staff have received training.	Part of normal operating costs of programs.
Broadmeadows College of TAFE - VIC	Initial developments were in response to joint industry/TAFE partnership program. Operating now within policy endorsed by State Training Board in November 1990.	Manager of Recognition and Assessment Centre handles College RPL applications. Specialist RPL staff and mainstream staff from discipline area are involved in Panels.	Three day training program in RPL has been provided for assessors. Shorter, specific training sessions have been provided for admin staff, counsellors, publicity and information service, staff and finance officers.	Start-up costs derived from major funding bodies. Operating budget partly covered by fees and charges for RPL.
Community Services School, Noarlunga College of TAFE - SA	Status as an RPL pilot project. Operating within Departmental draft RPL policy.	RPL Co-ordinator in Community Studies at the college has overall management responsibility. Mainstream teaching staff from discipline area are involved in Panels.	Have conducted 40 minute awareness seminars for teachers, clerical/support staff and student services officer at the College. Have provided three day RPL Assessor training program for 60 Community Services lecturing staff. Have also provided training for members of Child Care Course Advisory Group and the Community Services Advisory Group.	Start-up costs provided by DEET and the SA Social Justice Unit. On-going costs is an issue still to be addressed.

ORGANISATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

Organisation	Authorisation/ Mandate	Management Arrangements and Staffing	Training for Advisers/Assessors	Resourcing (set-up/ongoing)
Holmesglen College of TAFE - VIC Adult apprenticeship in Carpentry	1. Making use of current credit and exemptions procedures for carpentry apprentices. 2. Trialled RPL procedures for non-teaching staff in 1991 pilot using Broadmeadows RPL approach.	There is no nominated RPL manager in the College. Assessments are conducted by mainstream teaching staff.	10 College staff attended a 3 day RPL training session from a range of Schools in the College in 1991, given by Broadmeadows.	Part of normal costs of adult apprenticeship in carpentry training course.
Gilles Plains TAFE - Horticultural School	Proactive use of status/exemption procedures	No nominated manager. RPL is regarded as being "institutionalised" ie part of normal operations of student counselling and pastoral advice.	Half the school staff did 3 day training program in RPL given by Broadmeadows in 1991 including administrative and record keeping staff.	Training for staff ($3000) represents only set-up costs. Part of normal costs of training program.

SCALE AND SCOPE OF SERVICE

Organisation	Target Group, Volume of applications	Projected Demand	Areas/Disciplines in which RPL is available
Centre for Flexible Learning, Great Southern Regional College of TAFE - WA	All students undertaking flexibly delivered courses. Approximately 400 enquiries have been received this year with 300 granted some recognition.	Anticipate a strong demand. Since flexible delivery was introduced in Jan 1992 there has been an increase of 40% in F/T and 28% increase in P/T enrolments.	Various courses are fully available at the Certificate, Associate Diploma and Diploma level in: . Agriculture . Management, Business and Commercial Studies . Office and Secretarial Studies with parts of courses in a wide array of fields also available at the Centre.
Broadmeadows College of TAFE - Vic	Students enrolled in Broadmeadows College course. Mature age students including those retrenched in 1991, 79 students applied for RPL and 77 were granted some recognition.	Expect increased demand as RPL provisions become more widely instituted throughout discipline areas within the College. Refer to College's three year implementation strategy.	RPL is available currently in the following courses at the College: . Cert in Office and Secretarial Studies . Ass Dip in Office Administration . Ass Dip in Social Science (Child Care) . Ass Dip in Social Science (Community Dev) . Basic Electronics Certificate . Adv Cert in Electronics . Adv Cert in Marketing . Cert in Supervision
Community Services School, Noarlunga College of TAFE - SA	Workers in the Community Services industry who are experienced and skilled but reluctant to undertake a long course. In 1991/92 (start of pilot project) 70 enquiries for RPL were made, 40 made applications, 30 proceeded to the assessment stage and 27 were granted some recognition.	Probably now reflecting the full demand for RPL into Child Care. As the system is streamlined and available elsewhere in the State and in other disciplines and as students become aware of its availability, there will be many more applicants.	RPL is available currently in the following Community Services courses at the College: . Community Services Introductory Cert . Advanced Child Care Cert . Community Services Specialisation . Composite Certificate

SCALE AND SCOPE OF SERIVCE

Organisation	Target Group, Volume of applications	Projected Demand	Areas/Disciplines in which RPL is available
Holmesglen College of TAFE - Vic	1. Adults returning to study in particular those who have gained informal on-the-job skills but have no formal qualifications. 2. Staff within the college for staff development and recognition of job skills. In 1991 pilot - 14 non-teaching staff applied for RPL. 3. Industries classifying employees (fee-for-service effort). 4. Adult carpentry apprentices given RPL are not recorded separately, but huge influx of students want to do adult apprenticeship.	Expects present level of demand for RPL to continue - ie diagnostic test results in credit for many.	RPL is offered in the following areas in the College: . Carpentry - adult apprenticeships . Fibrous plastering . Business Studies . PLI - Industrial skills
Gilles Plains College of TAFE School of Horticulture	Employees in the amenity horticulture industry without quals, people seeking retraining, people wishing to re-enter the workforce. Approx 400 people are in accredited programs of whom 150 received recognition in 1992 calendar year. Working with industry and the employees to accommodate the needs of emerging awards.	Expects high on-going demand because of huge backlog of people working in the industry without credentials.	Credit is offered in the following courses in the College: . Cert in Horticulture . Adv Cert in Urban Horticulture . Ass Dip in Applied Science (Urban Horticulture) . Cert in Land Management . Cert in Pest and Weed Control

PROCESS FEATURES

Organisation	Fees and Charges	Limits on Credit	Benchmarks Used	Information and Application Stage
Centre for Flexible Learning, Great Southern Regional College of TAFE - WA	No costs or fees. "Not applicable"		Informal competency standards developed by industry for modules.	General material on flexible learning courses available etc is provided to applicants. In the initial contact with any member of the Centre's staff, the student's aspirations are discussed, a program is selected and counselling provided on delivery format and RPL. Counselling and support is given as part of the effort to select a suitable training program and starting point for student.
Broadmeadows College of TAFE - VIC	Costs for RPL are incorporated in enrolment fee. Currently charge $20 Administration fee + $60 Assessment fee. Draft fees/charges policy has been submitted to STB.	100% recognition possible unless curriculum prevents this.	Curriculum is reviewed to identify learning outcomes if these are not already documented. Applicant's skills are related to skills in the curriculum to establish equivalence.	Wide range of information routes including information sessions in college and industry, information provided by college counsellors for career guidance. Applicants are directed to Head of Department who gives out the application form for student to complete.
Community Services School, Noarlunga College of TAFE - SA	Following the Departmental draft fees policy. Applicants are charged the general service fee ($45) + admin fee. In Noarlunga the cost is the same as student would pay to attend the subject.	No - recognise 100% credit is quite a possibility.	Learning Outcomes of modules. These had to be developed by the project team before RPL could be implemented.	Students are invited to one of three Information Sessions held six weeks before classes begin. Information is then given re process and costs. Application forms, handouts and learning outcomes for modules are given to likely applicants. Assistance with filling in application form is provided by RPL Co-ordinator. Candidates are given ideas about supporting material they can bring to the interview.

PROCESS FEATURES

Organisation	Fees and Charges	Limits on Credit	Benchmarks Used	Information and Application Stage
Holmesglen College of TAFE, Vic	Strongly opposed to charging - part of the mainstream program. In fee-for-service assessments for industry, charges are $60 per hour plus travel for industry on-site assessments.	Informal decision made that no more than 50% credit will be granted.	Competency standards specified in curriculum documents (ie learning outcomes for units).	Very brief mention in Handbook under credits/exemptions. Candidate records provide an application form. Goes to library and reads curriculum documents and chooses areas in which to apply for credit. Candidate can ask for help from student services staff or departmental specialist. Student services set up interview times etc.
Gilles Plains College of TAFE - Horticultural School, SA	No costs or fees, as these are regarded as barrier. Fees are charged for industry assessments on fee-for-service basis.	Allow for 100% credit.	Informal competency standards in curriculum documentation.	RPL provisions included in course brochure and induction prior to enrolment. School holds a general info session and individual appointments are made with staff members. This is seen as part of the counselling process to determine a suitable learning program.

PROCESS FEATURES

Organisation	Evidence Considered	Assessment Arrangements	Post-assessment Guidance	Appeal Mechanisms	Recording/Recognition Arrangements
Centre for Flexible Learning, Great Southern Regional College of TAFE - WA	Depends upon the nature of the program. However can be as little as a discussion with staff member and as much as a written test.	Most usual form is a discussion with lecturer in the particular Study Area. The discussion involves a comparison of module objectives with student's verbal responses. Further evidence can be sought if felt necessary.	If a student fails a subsequent module, counselling occurs referring student to alternative material or recommencement. If a student is successful the student is counselled into next module including RPL arrangements.	Not necessary - student essentially determines starting point in conjunction with staff facilitator.	Each program module is numbered and each student has each module recorded against his/her name for RPL or success. Currently a card system is used but plans are in hand for a Computer Managed Learning System.
Broadmeadows College of TAFE - VIC	Wide range of evidence tendered by applicant is acceptable including employer testimonials, samples of work, observation of workplace performance, support person's verification. Panel seeks to draw out relevant evidence/experience in the interview. Further evidence may be required by Panel.	Applicant is interviewed by a Panel (1 hour approx) Panel comprises RPL expert + subject expert(s). Applicant may request presence of a support person in the interview.	Applicant is advised in writing of RPL outcomes and invited to contact Head of Department for guidance on course/subjects.	Appeal mechanisms apply.	RPL credits are recorded as an ungraded pass on student's record.
Community Services School, Ngarlunga College of TAFE - SA	Application form and a wide range of supporting evidence is acceptable. If further evidence is required by Panel to reach a decision this is negotiated with applicant. May include further interview, written assignment, workplace assessment, collection of other material etc.	Candidates self assess against the learning outcomes of the modules. Assessment mainly conducted by a Panel (course/subject expert + RPL expert) Workplace assessment is an assessment option some candidates prefer and this is arranged. Applicant may request presence of a support person or work supervisor in the interview.	Applicant advised promptly by phone of RPL outcome. Official notification from College then follows. If not successful, reasons given over phone and interview suggested. Unsuccessful applicants advised of appeal mechanisms. Top-up learning options prior to second assessment will be suggested.	Appeal mechanisms apply. Child Care Standards and Advisory Group would deal with appeals.	"Competent" recorded on the student record if recognition is granted.

PROCESS FEATURES

Organisation	Evidence Considered	Assessment Arrangements	Post-assessment Guidance	Appeal Mechanisms	Recording/Recognition Arrangements
Holmesglen College of TAFE	. Assessment form . Documents provided by candidate in support of claim eg: supervisor's endorsement . All carpentry adult apprentices do a diagnostic test. . DIR industrial skills students require a Stat Dec confirming number of years of experience.	Candidate is interviewed by a subject expert. Application form and evidence is reviewed. Candidate takes a diagnostic or challenge test. Assessor may contact work supervisor for verification of experience and skills. Decision on credit to be granted made by department or subject specialist.	Little formal post-assessment guidance.	Candidate can appeal in writing to Director.	Subjects credited are shown as 'Pass' on student record. No differentiation.
Gilles Plains College of TAFE. Horticultural School, SA	Evidence provided in application form and response to lecturer's questions in interview. Way is left open for further evidence to be gathered.	Informal interview with lecturer who confirms claim, and interviews candidate. Lecturer confirms top-up learning required and mark. This occurs before selection into course. After selection (v competitive), lecturer confirms status and training program. If there are objections from the student an assessment panel is convened. Lecturer in initial interview is proactive in encouraging information to support claim. Two person panel may be convened and in an interview situation they talk through learning outcomes with the applicant.	Results of RPL decisions are conveyed to students in a face to face situation.	Appeals can be made to Head of School.	"Status" recorded on student's record.

APPENDIX 2

Application of RPL for Appropriate Placement of Students in Courses in Higher Education

2.1 Introduction

Until recently, when university fees were minimal in Australia, most enrolled students completed their courses without seeking special consideration of advanced standing for what they know and can do. With funding rationalisation, a deepening recession, greater concern for cost-effectiveness, the need to increase graduation rates, and recognition of the previous inequality of access, universities and other tertiary education providers are turning their attention to the practice of RPL" (1)

Recognition of prior learning in the higher education sector to date has mainly focused on the recognition of formal studies completed at tertiary institutions in Australia and overseas. Only recently has any emphasis been given to the recognition of formal studies completed in TAFE colleges and other post-secondary training providers.

Recognition of "non-formal and experiential learning" gained through industry-based training, work experience or personal study has, for the most part, received little attention.

The terms used in the higher education sector need some clarification. "Advanced standing" refers to the "amount of exemption from a unit or units of an educational program granted to a student on the basis of previous study, relevant work experience or like skills"(2) . This broad definition allows for the recognition by a higher education institution of non-formal studies.

Current initiatives are concentrated in the area of articulation and credit transfer, both of which deal with the more formal and structured end of the learning continuum. Articulation refers to the "specific design of education and training programs which facilitate and maximise opportunities for credit transfer". Credit transfer is the "granting of advanced standing by institutions to students on the basis of previous study undertaken in another institution" (2).

Articulation is a design feature which offers linkages and progression opportunities between courses. In some multi-sector institutions the linkages are incorporated in the initial accreditation of a suite of courses. In other cases, articulation is negotiated for separately developed courses.

Thus it is possible for a student to commence a certificate course, proceed on through an associate diploma and finally enter a degree course. Recognition of a student's prior learning gained through successful completion of lower level courses is automatic.

The need to find improved pathways into and between educational sectors, most particularly the vocational education and training sector and the higher education sector, has prompted a series of projects to explore articulation and credit transfer arrangements and possibilities.

The National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET) and the Department of Employment, Education and Training funded a joint study in February 1989 on credit transfer practices in higher education and TAFE, which resulted in a published discussion paper. The National Board also sponsored a public seminar on credit transfer in March 1990 and subsequently established a Working Party on Credit Transfer to analyse responses to the Discussion Paper and the seminar. The outcome was Strategies in Credit Transfer presented by the National Board to Minister Dawkins in December 1990.

In 1991, Evaluations and Innovations Program of DEET commissioned a study by Donald Lewis on credit transfers between TAFE and higher education. Lewis' project involved a review of previous studies, a survey of admissions policies in the higher education sector (universities and colleges of advanced education), and a study of the subsequent performance of students at the Wollongong University who had been admitted on the basis of TAFE qualifications. Among his findings were the following:

"3. *The majority of institutions (72%) indicated that they grant advanced standing on the basis of TAFE qualifications. A further 19 per cent indicated that advanced standing was possible in certain instances but was usually restricted to particular faculties or courses. Only nine per cent of the institutions indicated that advanced standing was not possible on the basis of TAFE qualifications.*

4. *Most institutions that grant advanced standing still prefer to treat each case on its merits. Such policies make it difficult for students to anticipate the amount of advanced standing they will receive and contribute to inconsistencies between faculties and departments in the same university.*

5. *An Associate Diploma is the standard required by most institutions before an applicant will be considered for either admission or advanced standing on the basis of TAFE qualifications. A few institutions will consider someone who has a partially completed Associate Diploma or a completed Advanced Certificate" (3).*

He also found that the subsequent performance of students admitted to Wollongong University between 1986 and 1990 on the basis of TAFE qualifications was similar to that of other students in the university.

The National Board is required to provide the Minister with advice on an annual basis on progress on credit transfer in higher education institutions. The National Board established a Consultative Forum comprising key stakeholders in credit transfer in early 1992. The first Consultative Forum was held in Melbourne in March 1992.

In a related development the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee endorsed the recognition of appropriate prior TAFE and other learning in May 1992 and established a pilot Credit Transfer Project. This project is designed to develop governing principles and minimum levels of credit to enable a system-wide approach to recognition of formal studies in post

secondary education. The pilot project will initially target business studies, computing science and engineering, but will also seek information on the extent to which institutions take into account non-formal learning. Specific credit transfer initiatives taken by individual institutions or groups of institutions in the higher education section are documented in NBEET's advice to the Minister.

Credit transfer arrangements which recognise completed vocational education and training studies are in place at a number of individual universities. In such cases the approach has been either to:

* establish equivalence between vocational education and training subject(s) and a corresponding university subject, generally through a consideration of the curriculum documentation, reading lists, past examination papers and assessment processes, or

* provide a block exemption so that, for example, completion of an associate diploma gives advanced standing of one year into a bachelor's degree course.

Both these approaches allow for automatic and standardised treatment of advanced standing applications. No longer is a case by case consideration needed. Where individual institutions have taken these steps they tend to provide information to enrolling students in the form of a "Guide to Advanced Standing for TAFE Students" or a "Subject Exemption Schedule".

2.2 Case Studies of RPL Implementation

RPL arrangements in a number of higher education institutions were flagged by a variety of means - responses to advertisements placed in the national press, responses to a survey conducted by Noel Miller (Ford Motor Company - a summary is included at the end of this Appendix), references in the literature and by personal referral.

The selection of the following four case studies has been made to document different approaches in several disciplines:

. University of Southern Queensland, Further Education and Training Program
. Monash University Department of Police Studies
. University of Technology, Sydney:Telecom Training Sydney
. Deakin University Technology Management Centre

In addition to these institutions, valuable information about plans and current arrangements was provided by:

. University of Western Sydney;
. Faculty of Business, Swinburne University of Technology;
. Industry Training Services, Victoria University of Technology;
. Edith Cowan University, Perth; and
. Northern Territory University

Noel Miller kindly offered the project team his data on the tertiary institutions' policy on RPL and its awarding of advanced standing or credit for formal post-secondary studies, industry training and work experience. A summary of this data is included at the end of this Appendix.

2.3 University of Southern Queensland : Further Education and Training Program

In 1990, market demand from educators and trainers in government, business and industry training functions, TAFE, agricultural colleges, senior colleges and community and adult education prompted the University to develop the Bachelor of Teaching (Further Education and Training). This competency-based course provides the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for educators/trainers to develop their planning, instruction, evaluation and course design capabilities. The course is only offered in the external mode. Opportunities for RPL are highlighted in the course brochure and advertising.

The Further Education and Training Program has an RPL policy and guidelines and operates within the existing framework of the university's regulations. To be eligible for enrolment into the course, applicants must meet criteria of a professional/trade qualification, substantial experience in their field of expertise and current experience as a teacher/instructor/trainer.

"Students meeting the entry requirements of this course will be granted a seven unit block exemption. The equivalent of the first year of full-time study is normally granted on the basis of the student's advanced standing in terms of their previous professional training and experience". Students may seek further credit at a later stage for units in the three strands of the course. These further applications are handled by "standard exemption procedures" which may include consideration of documentary evidence, an interview and possibly a proficiency test.

2.4 Monash University : Department of Police Studies

The impetus for this RPL arrangement was the Head of Department's view that "it was absurd not to recognise what people have done and the professionalism of police officers and police organisations". Police training for sergeants, officers and detectives was substantial (typically a 10 week residential course).

The proposed arrangement to give block exemption for this training was strongly supported by the Vice-Chancellor and the Assistant Commissioner (Personnel). The recognition arrangements for detective and sergeant training were quickly put in place in 1986. The more recent arrangement whereby police of the rank of Chief Superintendent and above are admitted into the third year of the degree course, went through the Faculty Board in 1991 "without demur".

The Head of Department attributes this to Monash's "can do" culture and the support of the Vice-Chancellor and the police. A policy has been developed and approved by the Faculty

Board for Police Studies only. The Department has extended its operations and is offering the program, with its RPL provisions, to members of the New Zealand Police Force and is offering the Associate Diploma to the Cook Islands Police Force. The program is available through either face-to-face instruction or through a distance education mode.

The Department is confident about the value of its RPL arrangement. It has found the police students to be high achievers and a number are now studying for higher degrees. The arrangement has served other useful purposes. It has built goodwill between the police and the Department, encouraged many police to gain tertiary qualifications and eased the way into university studies.

2.5 University of Technology, Sydney : School of Adult and Language Education

The presence of a group of confident and very experienced trainers who needed to acquire a formal qualification encouraged the School to explore RPL. "They are prepared to complete the necessary tasks to validate what they know and are already doing, often because it is essential for career advancement" (4).

The Faculty has a far greater proportion of mature-aged adults than of students coming directly from high school and in 1991 the Faculty undertook a survey of students to investigate their responses to the idea of RPL. This led to the inclusion, in 1992, of a new feature in the Associate Diploma in Adult Education (Training) of "opportunities for students to obtain academic credit through recognition of prior learning".

Other new features were added to the course which also facilitated RPL and the recognition of part subjects as well as full subjects. These features were:

* a modular approach to subjects with flexible entry and exit procedures;

* competency-based curriculum and assessment programs; and

* a distance mode of learning and teaching.

The case study describes a partnership between UTS, Deakin University and Telecom Training Services which commenced in 1992 . The program provides recognition towards a formal training qualification for staff of Telecom Training Services.

2.6 Deakin University : Technology Management Centre

Victoria College (now part of Deakin University) became involved in RPL through its relationship with Ford Motor Company. RPL is one of a number of innovative features of the Technology Management Program which is designed to provide a more flexible approach to the delivery of programs that meet the needs of individuals and employers. The target group for the Centre's program is mature-age students in full-time employment.

The Technology Management Program is based on self-paced learning with its learning outcomes explicitly stated and a computer managed learning system. Achievement of learning outcomes is assessed through computer- marked short answer questions and tutor-marked assignment type questions. With such a learning system it is possible for RPL applicants to claim modules within a unit but, in these cases, the tutor negotiates this with the student on a more informal basis.

The Centre has a full-time staff member assigned to RPL duties. The Centre provides information, on a group and individual basis, about the program and RPL, and the different grounds for claiming specified/core units and unspecified units. The Centre has produced a Tutor's Manual, supporting material and information brochures for applicants. The RPL approach relies on a three person interview panel for most RPL assessments, although if the applicant's claim is well substantiated and documented, this step may be waived.

2.7 Observations and Issues

The position of the higher education section on credit transfer and recognition of "experiential learning" in particular, has been one marked by caution. This is clear from the findings of Noel Miller and Donald Lewis. However, innovation is occurring and this study identified a number of arrangements for RPL.

2.7.1 Nature of the student body

The four case studies all cater for mature-age students with considerable work-based experience and skills in the fields of study they selected. The need to acknowledge and build on this background has been accepted in each instance.

2.7.2 Commitment from key figures

All respondents noted a strong level of commitment to the introduction of RPL from some key figures in their university. Reactions from peers in other disciplines have been mixed.

2.7.3 Impact of different approaches to RPL

Two quite different approaches to the granting of recognition are illustrated in the case studies. The approach of the University of Southern Queensland and Monash University has been a low-key block exemption approach. This has flow on implications in other areas. The management and handling of RPL applicants is seen as a normal function of staff, specialised training for staff and other resource requirements are minimal and the timeframe for adoption is relatively short. No costs or fees are charged for RPL.

The approach adopted by the University of Technology, Sydney and the Technology Management Centre is more demanding. It involves establishing an equivalence between the

applicant's claimed learning and experience and the learning outcomes of course units. The task of determining whether equivalence exists falls to a three person panel with subject expertise and RPL expertise. The Panel reviews the candidate's claim and the evidence furnished in support of his/her claim. The Panel then interviews the applicant. It may then seek further evidence to enable equivalence to be determined. This approach has flow-on implications too, in terms of greater staffing and resource demands, significant training requirements for staff and longer lead times for implementation. Fees and charges for RPL assessment apply to offset the costs incurred.

2.7.4 Value of an outcomes-based curriculum

"Outcomes-based curriculum is a highly significant if not essential element for the efficient assessment of prior learning" was the view expressed by the Technology Management Centre. The same view was widely reported by implementors of RPL in the higher education sector. If RPL is to be successfully implemented, then the structure of both the accreditation and curriculum documents needs careful examination.

2.7.5 Importance of training in RPL

This matter was raised by those institutions establishing equivalence between an applicant's experience and learning and the learning outcomes of a subject/unit in a course. It is linked to the reported need for training in competency-based assessment in general.

2.7.6 Over-assessment and under-crediting

Cohen noted the tendency to over-assess and under-credit. This same point was made by the Technology Management Centre in its Manual for Tutors *"In some cases RPL candidates are often assessed more thoroughly than their on-campus colleagues which brings into question the quality of assessment for non-credit students"*(5).

2.7.7 Interest in a range of approaches

This was the most common issue raised and reinforces the considerable interest in building on other's experiences.

2.7.8 Attitudinal issues

Attitudinal issues lie at the heart of the matter in the higher education sector. It was reported to the project team that much of this resistance relates to the preservation of academic standards. The reluctance on the part of many institutions to recognise fully studies completed in another institution, let alone studies in the vocational education and training sector, was noted as a characteristic response.

Credit transfer schemes for TAFE studies raise concerns about the evenness of standards across TAFE colleges - not whether a minimum acceptable level had been achieved, but rather about the relative standing of graduates from different TAFE colleges - and the issue of the standard of teaching within TAFE by non-graduate staff.

Recognition of prior learning derived from sources other than formal studies raises far greater concerns. Respondents noted a generally low level of understanding of RPL amongst their colleagues and a "conservatism of academic staff towards granting of credit based on prior learning".

2.7.9 Opposition to competency-based training

Within the higher education sector, and expressed by various vice-chancellors, is a view that competency-based learning is inappropriate in a university setting. This view is not shared by all in the higher education sector and a number of academics are working with the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition to develop competency standards for the professions. Without competency standards, however, recognition of prior learning can be idiosyncratic and costly.

2.7.10 Effect of student quotas

The prevailing high demand for student places has led to the view that concessions do not have to be made to would-be students. The presence of institutionally set quotas on courses limits the extent to which staff could actively promote the RPL provision or maximise student throughput by this means. In the case studies, access to RPL arrangements is only available to those who secure a place in the course.

2.7.11 Clarification of unknown effects of RPL

The impact of RPL on a number of other matters was not known but was of concern. These matters include the effect of successful RPL outcomes on measures of institutional efficiency and productivity, HECS charges and student allowances.

2.7.12 Employer perceptions of RPL credits

Concern was expressed by one respondent that employers may not always see an RPL pass as being equivalent to a pass by coursework. This view was not shared by other respondents but their view depended in part on how their institution reported the RPL credit on the student's academic transcript.

2.7.13 Student reluctance to claim credit

One respondent reported diffidence on the part of students to claim credit. This diffidence was based on the risk of failure, lack or self confidence or the belief that they may miss out on something of value. Other respondents who more actively promote RPL in initial information sessions did not report this as an issue.

In summary, there are well developed approaches which give recognition to prior learning in the higher education sector. However, the higher education sector as a whole still has to tackle, in a meaningful way, the issue of recognising learning gained through non-formal studies.

2.8 References

1. Cohen, Ruth. *Experience Counts! Recognition of Prior Learning Using Experienced-Based Learning for Academic Credit.* March 1992, p.2.

2. National Board of Employment, Education and Training, *Credit Transfer Discussion Paper.* 1989, p.43

3. Lewis, Donald E. *Credit Transfers between TAFE and Higher Education.* 1991

4. Cohen, Ruth. *Experience Counts!* Conference Paper 1992

5. Technology Management Centre, Deakin University. *Tutor's Manual*

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HIGHER EDUCATION DATA

Source: Noel Miller (research project)

No formal policy at this stage

Australian Catholic University - no formal policy on RPL at this stage.

University of Adelaide - does not have a policy on RPL in the occupational/work experience/life experience sense .....Some courses, now part of this University from the merger process, do accept such prior learning for entry...

Phillip Institute of Technology

James Cook University of North Queensland - does not have a policy on RPL although individual faculties are considering it.

La Trobe University - general practice for dealing with prior learning is very decentralised to departments.

University of Melbourne

Australian Defence Force Academy

The University of Western Australia

The University of Sydney

The University of Queensland - each Faculty administers its own rules so policy varies from Faculty to Faculty.

The Australian National University

University of Western Sydney

Australian Maritime College

Northern Territory University - in the higher education sector no policy has been developed or is planned at this stage.

Flinders University - does not currently have a general policy on the RPL process but is about to review its policies on status and exemption on the grounds of prior educational experience

Using existing exemptions/credit procedures

Ballarat University College - no comprehensive policy, although within some courses recognition is given for formal training conducted by industry or education. Occasionally some credit might be given for work experience, but this is the exception rather than the norm.

The University of Southern Queensland - credit is possible for formal training gained elsewhere. The University has no policy at the moment regarding the granting of credit for work experience, although a number of Schools, particularly Engineering and Education, do grant partial exemptions for experience obtained in industry.

Edith Cowan University - exemptions policy provides for credit on the basis of work experience. To date this has largely been exemption from the practical components of courses though a limited number of exemptions from academic units have been approved on this basis. The University is planning a pilot RPL project for 1992/93.

The University of New England (Northern Rivers) - uses Advanced Standing provisions which allow quite generous recognition of post-secondary achievements from other institutions. Academic credit for work experience and documented in-service training is provided in some courses, notably those in the personnel and training disciplines.

Griffith University - allows for credit to be granted on the basis of academic achievement, normally at a recognised tertiary institution. The credit policy is under review and work experience and life experience are under consideration.

Macquarie University

Victoria University - although no university wide policy has been adopted, many Departments recognise work experience and formal training conducted by industry and may grant advanced standing to some applicants for some courses.

La Trobe University - produces fairly detailed schedules of specific credit to be given for particular courses and training undertaken at other institutions and TAFE Colleges - especially with regard to Business Studies.

Bond University - credit allowed for successful prior completion of similar and dissimilar subjects undertaken at another approved post-secondary institution. Exemption may be granted for prior non-academic experience and/or short courses and seminars, certificates and so on, in the specific area of the subject. In exceptional cases, challenge examinations may be granted on the basis of prior work experience alone.

Queensland University of Technology

Hawthorn Institute of Education - exemptions procedures with each case considered on its merits.

Charles Sturt University - recognises prior learning through the policy on Proficiency Credit which allows for consideration to be given to work experience and life experience.

University of South Australia - uses Status and Exemptions provisions to recognise formal studies or professional experience. Has a provision for status to be granted on the basis of a competency test.

University of NSW - has no policy on RPL. Advanced standing is generally granted for studies undertaken at other tertiary institutions or at TAFE. This does not mean there may not be some instances where credit is given for training in industry or work experience. One general exception exists where older students may claim exemption from part of the General Education Program.

Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney - advanced standing may be granted for relevant tertiary study completed (TAFE qualification will not normally qualify applicant for credit).

Murdoch University - prior learning in the form of completed or part-completed qualifications is used for the purposes of assessing candidates for admission, for credit transfer and exemption from course requirements. The University does not recognise work or life experiences for credit or course exemptions.

Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology - no formal RPL policy for the higher education sector but exemptions can be granted on the basis of previous studies and in some instances work/life experience is taken into account for the purposes of entry to a course.

Curtin University of Technology - use of Advanced Standing and Credit Exemptions policy is flexible. Uses "challenge tests" in some instances where candidates claim to have a body of knowledge either through work experience or a foreign qualification. These tests are essentially the same as the examinations scheduled for the units in question. In such instances credit is given for passing the challenge test.

Developing an RPL policy

University of Canberra - working party recently established, has not yet developed a policy.

Deakin University - no policy on RPL, but Victoria College (now part of the University) formulated an RPL Articulation and Credit Transfer Policy which allows for both accredited courses and experiential and uncertificated learning. The Technology Management Centre has the most developed approach to RPL within the University.

Monash University - in the process of formulating a policy statement relating to credit transfer. The Credit Transfer policy is yet to receive formal approval by the Academic Board.

University of Technology, Sydney - the matter of RPL is being currently assessed for policy guidance. It is expected that preliminary findings will be presented to the Student Matters Committee and then presented to the Academic Board for consideration in August 1992.

ORGANISATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

Organisation	Authorisation/ Mandate	Management Arrangements and Staffing	Training for Advisers/Assessors	Resourcing (set-up/ongoing)
Further Education and Training Program - University of Southern Queensland	Course developed in response to market demand	All RPL is done by the head of Program with consultation with content experts	Incidental, specific sessions on RPL have been given to staff.	No special resourcing has been involved - regarded as part of normal entry assessments.
Department of Police Studies, Monash University	Approval for the RPL arrangement granted by the Faculty Board.	Head of Department is responsible for arrangements. Lecturing staff are also involved - seen as part of their normal function.	On-the-job training.	Start-up costs are negligible - operating costs also seen as negligible and part of the Departmental operating budget.
University of Technology, Sydney Program for Telecom Training Services		Nominated manager is the main researcher/developer of projects and policy. One porson is nominated to act for each of the courses in which RPL is offered.	General training sessions have been given to lecturing staff.	Start-up costs include preparation of handbook, application forms. Other costs include postage, staff time and space.
Technology Management Centre, Deakin University	Policy on Credit for Experiential and Non Certificated Learning passed by Victoria College Academic Board in 1988 as part of course accreditation process.	A Lecturer is nominated as the RPL Manager in the Centre. All told 1.5 staff positions devoted to RPL work. Assessment is carried out by Panel of 3 staff members by interviewing applicant.	Three day special training sessions (which includes RPL) held for all staff involved in the programs - includes admin staff. Manual has been developed for Tutors' use.	Start-up costs covered by Victorian Education Foundation. RPL fee income ($180 per student) covers operating budget.

SCALE AND SCOPE OF SERVICE

Organisation	Target Group, Volume of applications	Projected Demand	Areas/Disciplines in which RPL is available
FE & T Program - University of Southern Queensland	Industry and government training personnel and TAFE teachers 60 people pa have been granted RPL since 1990.	Anticipate increased demand with increasing student intake to the course in 1993 (80)	Recognition of Prior Learning is available within Bachelor of Teaching (Further Education and Training) and Graduate Diploma (FE & T).
Police Studies, Monash University	Police and non-police law enforcement officers - older, experienced officers without formal qualifications. Since 1986 approx 150 police have taken advantage of RPL arrangements and recently 8 Chief Superintendents	Anticipate an increase in demand because of the attractiveness of the RPL provision. Police Officers increasingly need a tertiary qual for promotion. The average retirement age is now 50 and police need to build a second career - tertiary qual helpful here too.	. Associate Diploma in Police Studies . BA (Police Studies).
University of Technology, Sydney program for Telecom Training Services	Adults in work needing a formal qualification. Initially people working in Telecom Training Services. In the 1992 enrolment period 8 people applied for RPL and 4 were granted recognition for subject(s). Other enrolled students in the Associate Diploma course can also apply for RPL.	Anticipate further demand as the word spreads.	Associate Diploma in Adult Education (Training)
Technology Management Centre, Deakin University	Mature age people in full-time employment. 400 applications were made for RPL in 1992. Marketing directed at companies and small businesses.	Slight increase in RPL applicants expected but ceiling exists on number of enrolments allowed.	Articulated sets of course: . Applied Science (Technology Mgt) - Foundation Studies, Cert, Associate Diploma, Bachelor Degree . Applied Science (Information Mgt) - Certificate, Associate Diploma, Bachelor degree . Bachelor of Business (Management) (Ford) Supervision Certificate

PROCESS FEATURES

Organisation	Fees and Charges	Limits on Credit	Benchmarks Used	Information and Application Stage
Further Education and Training Program - University of Southern Queensland	No cost	University regulations limit credits awarded to between 25 and 66% of the course.	Students meeting the entry requirements of the course will be granted a 7 unit block exemption for recognised prior learning and experience.	Information is given to applicants by Head of Program (FE & T) or University Enrolments Section. Application form is completed with statements of outcomes/competencies claimed.
Police Studies, Monash University	No cost	Maximum Credit allowable - 14 units of total of 20 units for degree.	Rank, with an associated understanding of the skills and competencies gained by the officer.	Marketing of arrangement through career advisers with Victorian and Federal Police. Word of mouth is most effective. Initial interview with Head of Department who explains procedures and discusses training program. Applicant completes a standard Application for Exemption form.
University of Technology, Sydney program for Telecom Training Services	Policy not fully developed	Limit on credit within UTS is up to two-thirds of a qualification.	Learning outcomes "competencies" identified in each module.	Applicants read the Handbook for RPL and can discuss the requirements with a tutor. Applicant self-assesses experience against competencies in the module selected. Applicants claim and evidence in support is documented then in Application Form.
Technology Management Centre, Deakin University	Charge for RPL built into all student fees. Fee $180 represents the costs of RPL averaged across all applicants.	Limit on credit is up to two-thirds of a qualification.	Learning Outcomes listed in course documentation for Specified or Core Units. Unspecified Units - wide range of acceptable evidence but equivalent to post Year 12. Sixty hour contact subject.	Applicants are advised how to frame their claim in an orientation session. Applicants are given a booklet and an application form. Support in application phase provided by Tutor or Program Manager on an individual basis.

PROCESS FEATURES

Organisation	Evidence Considered	Assessment Arrangements	Post-assessment Guidance	Appeal Mechanisms	Recording/Recognition Arrangements
FE & T - University of Southern Queensland	. Application form . Recognised qualification (trade/professional) in applicant's content area . Substantial industry or commercial experience in professional content area . Experience as teacher/ trainer/instructor in area of expertise . Employer verification of employment	Head of Program in conjunction with content experts review applications with candidate during first residential period. The use of block credit approach makes RPL quite straightforward. Claims for additional subjects are handled using standard exemption procedures.	Not applicable - only general course counselling.	Appeals are possible for RPL claims for additional subjects. (ie beyond 7 granted). Applicant writes to Associated Dean seeking review of assessment decision.	Recorded as "exemptions" on the academic transcript for unspecified studies or against specific subjects.
Police Studies, Monash University	. Application form . Confirmation of rank	Automatic block exemption. One subject for completion of sergeants training, one for completion of detective/officer training. Admission to third year of degree program for those with Chief Superintendents rank.	Not applicable - only general course counselling.	"Not necessary"	Academic transcript shows number of subjects credited as "completed."
University of Technology, Sydney program for Telecom Training Services	Overall appropriateness of the application and the evidence presented in support of the claim - work experience - formal and non-formal training completed - other life experiences	Interview with panel of three (two RPL experts + lecturer in charge of subject claimed). Further evidence may be sought eg projects, essays, tests etc.	Debriefing of candidates after assessment plus written evaluation sent to the applicant advising how much of the credit (full or partial) has been awarded.		Full credit for subject is recorded on academic transcript as "RPL granted". Partial credit for subject is recorded in subject records.
Technology Management Centre, Deakin University	. Application form detailing claim . Additional information and evidence brought to interview . Authentication of claim with employer/supervisor	Interview with panel of three (subject specialists + Program Manager). Evidence reviewed. Further evidence may be sought eg CML tests, checks with supervisor. Panel makes recommendation to Course Committee.	Generally not required. Applicant informed of outcome by electronic mail.	Developing an Appeals Mechanism.	Credit noted on academic transcript as" XC". Student has easy access to student assessment record.

APPENDIX 3

Application of RPL in the Right To Practise in Regulated Occupations and in the Certification of Competencies

3.1 Introduction

For many Australians working in the unregulated labour market there is one employment hurdle - securing the initial job. Completion of a formal qualification is not usually a pre-requisite for entry level employment. Training is often provided on the job. There is no licensing authority, registration board or professional association regulating the conditions of entry into these occupations. These occupations include, for example, clerical and administrative jobs, jobs in retail, child care and community services fields, jobs in rural industries, and production jobs in manufacturing industries.

For many occupations, State or Federal legislation regulates conditions of entry. In South Australia, for example, State legislation regulates the following occupations:

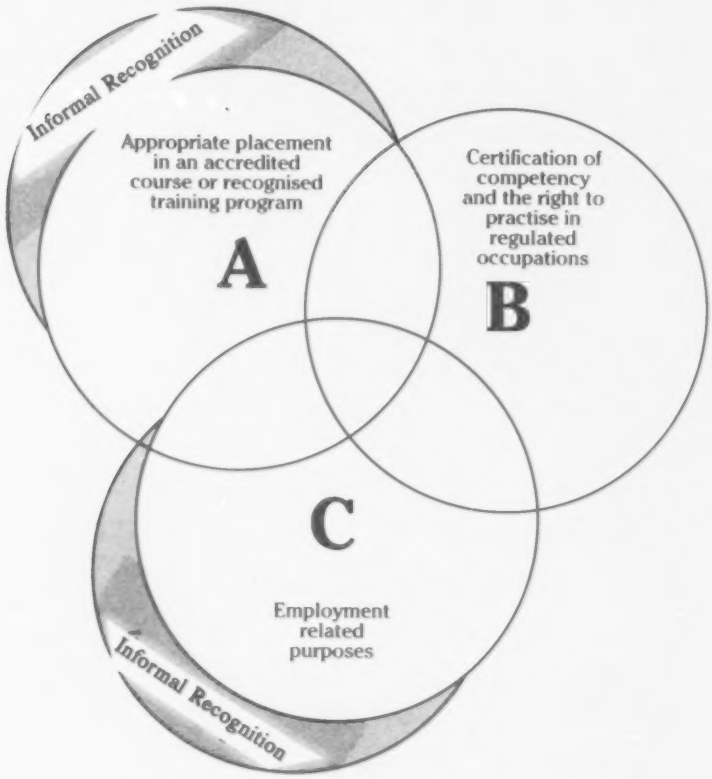
- Architecture
- Building contactors
- Chiropodists
- Dentists
- Dental Technicians
- Electricians
- Hairdressers
- Barristers
- Solicitors
- Medical practitioners
- Medical specialists
- Nurses
- Occupational therapists
- Opticians
- Pharmacists
- Plumbers & gasfitters
- Psychologists
- Real estate agents
- Surveyors
- Veterinary surgeons
- Teachers

The right to practise in these occupations typically requires completion of an approved training course and a period of supervised work experience. A bewildering array of licensing authorities, registration bodies and professional associations are empowered to recognise the applicant's competency. This recognition bestows the right to practise.

The pathway into trades is usually through a formal apprenticeship. For those who have completed an indentured period of training both on-and off-the-job, this is a straightforward matter. The problem lies with those who gained their skills through overseas training and/or work experience, through the Australian Defence Forces or on-the-job in Australia.

The Victorian Task Force on Overseas Qualifications noted in 1990 that *"... while trade accreditation is not necessarily required before a person can be employed in their trade ... it is likely to become an important issue as award restructuring is implemented and career progression is based on recognised skill levels"* (1)

Special arrangements have been made to provide "recognition" through the issue of certificates equivalent to trade certificates. The assessment is divorced from its original training context. What is being recognised is the prior learning that has been gained by whatever means. This Appendix explores some of the special arrangements made to recognise trade skills in Australia. In terms of the diagram, below these arrangements are in Circle B.



New demands for recognition have emerged with the endorsement of industry competency standards. Many others who are not working in a regulated environment, but are affected by award restructuring, are seeking recognition of their competencies.

Several industries are establishing new recognition mechanisms for this purpose. These mechanisms are designed firstly to enable employees in the industry to gain recognition for the skills they already possess in terms of the competency standards. Secondly, these industries are hoping that by providing recognition for what employees know and can do, employees will be encouraged to pursue training and extend their skill base.

This means that the recognition arrangements must allow for progressive attainment of competencies as well as certification of full competency or 100 per cent recognition. As part of the wider skills formation thrust, these arrangements are more supportive and less judgemental and actively avoid, through counselling, situations of failure and hopelessness. Several case studies adopting this approach are included. In terms of the Applications of RPL diagram, these arrangements fall between the three intersecting circles, A,B and C.

3.2 Case Studies of the Implementation of RPL

Information was obtained from a number of skills recognition services and from people initiating industry-based skill recognition pilot studies. In addition to the case studies presented in this section:

- Trade Recognition Service, Commonwealth Department of Industrial Relations
- ACT Skills Recognition Service
- Tile Industry Training Committee and TAFECOM Tile Laying Project
- ACCESS - Tourism Hospitality and Training

Valuable information was provided by respondents on the following arrangements:

- Certification of Trade Skills Programs, State Training Board of Victoria for non-TRRA trades
- Building and Construction IETC, WA - pilot project for painters and decorators, and bricklayers
- Hospitality and Tourism IETC, WA - pilot project for cooks
- Recognition Process for Experienced Non-formally Qualified Cooks, SA

Interviews were held with a number of other key respondents from the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSA) and the Migrant Skills/Qualifications Unit of Western Australia, South Australia and Victoria to provide a perspective on how these skills recognition arrangements impact on

migrants. A considerable amount of material and many reports were provided by these respondents - all of which has helped to clarify this complex area.

Three of the case studies selected illustrate the recognition processes for trade qualifications while the other one illustrates the hospitality industry's response to recognition of competencies.

3.3 Trades Recognition Service (TRRA), Commonwealth Department of Industrial Relations

The Tradesmen's Rights Regulation Act (TRRA) is an interesting example of a national mechanism for skills recognition. The Act was initially designed to provide a process for the upgrading and recognition of skills, and assured the re-employment of skilled workers returning to the civilian workforce after the war.

Australia's post-war migration programs brought people with much needed skills to the country. A mechanism was required to recognise their skills. TRRA was amended in 1952 to provide for the assessment of the trade skills of migrants in 68 metal and electrical occupations. Applicants who can satisfy the assessment criteria are issued with Australian Recognised Trades Certificates which are accepted by unions and employers throughout Australia.

This is a major area of largely unrecognised RPL activity. In the metals and electrical trades fields covered by TRRA (and almost half of Australia's tradespeople are in occupations covered by this Act), nearly 9,000 people overseas applied through TRRA to have their trade skills assessed in 1990/91. Some 5,249 applications were made in Australia in 1991/92 and in the last two years, over 8,600 have received recognition under TRRA.

Committees for each of the five trade groups, with Commonwealth Government, employer and union representatives operate at the national and state level. The Central Trades Committees "determine policy issues, such as conditions under which a person shall be recognised as a tradesperson. They assess applications from some countries and also review any questions raised about decisions of Local Trades Committees".

Local Trades Committees determine individual applications and issue Australian Recognised Tradesman's Certificates who persons to meet the requirements. To assist the applicant in Australia and the Local Trades Committee in its decision making, the Department of Industrial Relations employs technical advisers in each State/Territory.

The TRRA service has, in recent years, actively marketed its services to various target groups in both city and country areas. A wide range of marketing approaches is used. DIR officers write to and give presentations to ethnic community organisations and other community/service organisations. Promotional visits are

made to individual companies and employers to alert management and employees to the provisions of the Act. Field exercises are organised in conjunction with the Commonwealth Employment Service, preceded by advertisements and articles in the local and ethnic press. These promotional activities have encouraged increased applications for trade recognition

3.4 ACT Skills Recognition Service

The service was established in 1990 under the A.C.T. Vocational Training Act 1989 *"to provide employment and career advancement opportunities for people who do not have the formal qualifications usually required for the occupation in which they are working. These people, however, while not possessing formal qualifications usually required for their occupation, have demonstrated competence in that occupation: competency gained through experience"* (2)

At the outset recognition was available for cooking and hairdressing but in 1992 the service was extended to include carpentry and joinery, wall and floor tiling, painting and decorating, bricklaying, plastering and signwriting. There are plans to include horticulture, baking, cabinetmaking and butchery by the end of 1992.

The starting point for recognition is the development of skill recognition competency schedules for each occupation. This task is carried out by skills advisory panels established for each trade. The skills advisory panels are also the mechanism for assessing claims for recognition of prior learning.

The service is interesting in its use of an information kit which is sent to applicants. This Kit provides readable information about the units of competency and standards expected, and allows the candidate to self assess and organise his/her claim for recognition.

The Service has been widely promoted and hundreds of people have made enquiries about it. The early response in terms of application forms actually lodged has been a bit disappointing - staff believe that people are afraid of assessment and the possibility of failure.

Efforts are made by the skills advisory panels to counsel candidates who do not achieve full recognition about the training and experience they need in order to be competent.

3.5 Tile Industry Training Committee and TAFECOM, NSW

The NSW Building Services Corporation recently announced changes to the building trades licensing arrangements in order to improve standards of work in the residential building industry. The changes, which apply from 1 October 1992, require applicants for a Gold Card Contactor Licence or Qualified Supervisor

Certificate who do not hold acceptable TAFE (or equivalent) qualifications, to undergo a compulsory practical test. These tests are to be conducted by TAFE at the Building Industry Skills Centre within the Western Sydney Institute of TAFE. In case of country applicants, the Skills Centre may contract country TAFE colleges to conduct assessments on its behalf.

These changes apply across the building trades - carpentry and joinery, bricklaying, painting and decorating, floor and wall tiling, fencing, structural landscaping, glazing and minor building maintenance.

This case study describes a pilot project conducted in May 1992 for floor and wall tilers who will require practical testing under the new Building Trades Licensing arrangements. The RPL process is a joint venture between the Tile Industry Training Committee and TAFECOM. In the pilot scheme, applicants underwent an interview, a practical trade test and an oral theory test. As a result of the pilot, refinements are being made to the processing of applications, a brochure and a video are being produced, and a marketing strategy is being planned.

3.6 ACCESS

ACCESS was initiated as part of the new training arrangements developed under the auspices of Tourism Training Australia. The scheme was launched in July 1991 as a national one with active support from employer associations, unions, professional associations, key employers, TAFE and State training authorities.

ACCESS provides recognition for competencies gained by basic and advanced operatives in the hospitality industry who do not have formal qualifications.

"Under ACCESS, competency profiles have been developed for each of the modules which set out the skills and performance standards required in the particular skill area covered by these modules, based on the competency standards endorsed by the National Training Board. These are used by 'module experts', who have been trained in the associated procedures, to undertake assessments of individuals seeking recognition".(3)

Skills assessments are conducted by trained workplace assessors ("module"experts) in the workplace or through approved assessment centres. ACCESS also has a "system of industry assessors who license workplace assessors, handle appeals and undertake random monitoring of assessments in different settings. Industry assessors are experienced workplace assessors who can assess across a range of areas, have management experience in the industry and who have undertaken an additional one day training program on their role and the operation of ACCESS"(4). The system of trained workplace assessors and industry assessors is part of the quality assurance process of the program.

A range of materials has been developed for ACCESS including:

- Career Portfolio provided to registrants;
- Employer's Guide;
- Employee's Guide;
- Handbook with competency profiles for the relevant stream;
- Proformas for assessor's use; and
- National data base.

Considerable care has been taken to develop a simple system with the minimum paperwork requirements consistent with a national scheme.

The case study in the following table describes the operations of ACCESS in South Australia. The service has been promoted though press releases in union and employer publications, display boards in major companies and TAFE colleges. A flyer was included in the pay packets of employees in some major establishments. They are starting to market ACCESS in country areas using regional radio and press. Marketing is an issue and at present, the feeling is that there is minimal level of awareness amongst employers of smaller establishments.

3.7 Issues Raised by Respondents

The case studies provide evidence that, apart from TRRA with its national coverage of the metal and electrical trades, activity in this area is largely confined to the hospitality and building industries.

The mechanisms employed to recognise prior learning for trade qualifications and licensing purposes and to recognise competencies for award purposes vary considerably. The variables appear to be whether the skills recognition arrangement is:

* national or State-based in its coverage; and

* managed by government (Federal or State) or an industry training body.

Any of these combinations is currently possible.

TRRA is a national arrangement, managed by the Commonwealth Department of Industrial Relations, which relies on tri-partite central and local trade committees supported by trade qualified Departmental technical advisers. In the A.C.T. a similar arrangement has been set up by the Vocational Training Authority for the non-TRRA trades, although its mandate is restricted to the A.C.T.

ACCESS is also a national scheme but, in this case, it was set up by, and operates through, the hospitality industry training body - Tourism Training Australia.

Issues raised by respondents in a range of areas of enquiry throughout this study are addressed in the following section.

3.7.1 Assessment criteria

The need for competency standards was frequently cited as a key requirement - "industry must determine its standards". Having clear competency standards as a basis for assessment was seen as a way of circumventing several other problems.

One of the major problems reported was that time-serving considerations still colour judgements, despite moves to competency-based approaches. One respondent said we need to *"accept the removal of the 'time' basi. when discussing training, and recognise the need to credential distinct skills and not be tied down to 'life long' training goals"*.

Several respondents noted that consideration of what the TAFE course includes also clouded judgements. This is especially problematic when the *"content of TAFE courses (are) not keeping pace with what is happening in industry - TAFE's insistence on inclusion of skills no longer used"*.

The migrant advocates also saw that use of industry-based competency standards would substantially improve the situation for their clients. They believed it would reduce "systemic discrimination" whereby local training arrangements are seen as superior to training arrangements in other countries, especially non-English speaking countries.

3.7.2 Full and part recognition of skills/competencies

ACCESS is designed to permit recognition of some of the full set of competencies required for job performance. This is part of its overall skills formation strategy. The TRRA Manager in Victoria said that *"TRRA has the capacity to conduct assessment of partial trade competencies although currently it can only give recognition for full trade status - all or nothing approach"*. He favours moving towards partial recognition and encouraging applicants to gain additional competencies in the way ACCESS does.

3.7.3 Assessment fears inhibiting applications

The anticipated demand for recognition is not as high as several services were led to believe, and several respondents believe that it is the fear of assessment and failure which is discouraging people from applying for recognition. The services receive many enquires but only a small proportion lodge applications. It is believed that the assessment process mentioned in brochures and applications frightens people away. This is an issue which may take time to address.

3.7.4 Securing commitment from employers, unions and training providers

Gaining industry and union acceptance at the local level was seen as being vital. Respondents noted that despite endorsement of principles at the national level, this did not necessarily flow though to local counterparts.

Employers needed to be persuaded that it was "not a short cut to qualifications". They need to see the "practical benefits but also want to see someone else doing it first". One respondent felt that special incentives may have to be provided to encourage participation by small business.

Negotiation of commitment from all parties may involve frustration. One respondent noted with some feeling *"A great assistance would be the removal of the vast number of groups who seek to participate in recognition and credentialling".*

3.7.5 Resourcing issues

One service noted that resource limits meant that no payment was provided for members' time on skills advisory panels. Their service was relying on substantial commitments of time from panel members in developing competency schedules and making RPL assessments. Sooner or later they felt the service would run out of goodwill.

Several respondents challenged the expectation that the skills recognition services could be self-funding. They queried whether TRRA was expected to be self-funding. Setting fees on a cost recovery basis would further discourage people from securing recognition, especially migrants and those out of work.

3.7.6 Assessment issues

A number of issues relating to assessment was raised by respondents:

* The need for a quality assurance process to ensure comparability of assessment across a range of different assessment settings. Efforts to improve comparability include providing training for assessors and the supportive, quality assurance role played by industry assessors.

* Considerable support is required for workplace assessors after their initial period of training in conducting workplace assessments.

* Problems were reported gaining access to TAFE colleges for trade testing. One respondent found it impossible to arrange trade testing for applicants for three months of the year. As a consequence, this service had moved away to recognised private providers and skills centres for its trade testing.

3.7.7 Post-assessment counselling phase

The importance of post-assessment counselling phase was widely recognised, especially for candidates who do not secure 100 per cent recognition. Service providers believe counselling should be provided as promptly as possible and in a face-to-face interview situation. The session needs to include guidance on training opportunities or work experience which would remedy areas where competency could not be recognised.

3.7.8 Record keeping

Respondents believed that it was important to keep the recording system and other paperwork requirements simple. The use of a data base to record outcomes was widely employed.

3.7.9 Assistance for migrant applicants

Migrants form one of the main target groups for all these programs. Their ability to gain recognition is being compromised by a number of factors. Respondents drew attention to the need for bridging programs/orientation sessions before any assessment took place. These sessions could cover trade terminology and jargon, Australian work practices, legislation and regulations governing work practices, OH&S and so on. In some cases, occupationally-specific English language training may also be required.

The migrant skills recognition units noted that most of the information brochures and application forms are only available in English. The migrant applicant may need to take the material to an interpreter and, where English is not a requirement for certification, the service needs to facilitate access to interpreter services. One respondent urged that trade tests be developed in different languages but another respondent observed that the costs involved would make this prohibitively expensive.

3.7.10 Mutual support and assistance for other new services

Suggestions were made about ways to provide mutual support and extend assistance to other bodies seeking to provide a skills recognition service. These suggestions included:

* establish a network of practitioners;

* document and publicise procedures that work; and

* develop and market packages ("unified and quality controlled") which would enable people to select approaches and materials to suit their own application.

3.8 References

1. Victorian Task Force on Overseas Qualifications, *The Challenge of Change: Enriching Futures*, Melbourne, VGPS 1990

2. ACT Vocational Training Authority *RPL Interim Report*, November 1991, p.2.

3. Rein A. *Competency Based Assessment*, Conference Paper, 1992 p.3

4. Ibid p.4

ORGANISATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

Organisation	Authorisation/ Mandate	Management Arrangements and Staffing	Training for Advisers/Assessors	Resourcing (set-up/ongoing)
Trade Recognition Service (TRRA) Department of Industrial Relations	Tradesmen's Rights Regulation Act, 1946. In 1952 the Act was amended to provide for assessment and recognition of migrants' trades skills	Overall management exercised by Manager of Trade Recognition Service, supported by Technical Advisors. Offices located in all States, the NT and ACT and in London (UK)	Technical Advisers are all trade-qualified in a trade covered by TRRA	Part of normal departmental budget. Partial cost recovery through application and trade test fees.
ACT Skill Recognition Service	Set up in 1990 under the A.C.T. Vocational Training Act 1989.	The Skills Recognition Service has an operational manager and a policy manager. The Service is staffed by Field Officers and a Skills Recognition Registrar.	General training sessions and on-the-job training has been provided for all staff. Procedures manual has been developed for the use of Skills Advisory Panels.	Start-up costs were financed by 2 VEETAC grants. On going operating costs are part of the Vocational Training Authority's budget.

ORGANISATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

Organisation	Authorisation/ Mandate	Management Arrangements and Staffing	Training for Advisers/Assessors	Resourcing (set-up/ongoing)
Tile Industry Training Committee and TAFECOM - Tile Laying Pilot Project NSW	Building Services Corporation announced changes to Building Trades Licensing arrangements. From Oct 1, 1992 applicants for a Gold Card Contractor License or Qualified Supervisor Certificate who do not hold accepiable qualifications will be required to undertake a practical trade test.	The pilot project is a joint project between the Tile Industry Training Committee and TAFE Com. A Quality Assurance Co-ordinator has been appointed by TAFE and an RPL Co-ordinator appointed by Building Services Corp.	Training has been provided by Broadmeadows for TAFE staff who will carry out the assessment at the Building Industry Skills Centre.	Pilot project is being funded by NSW Education and Training Foundation. Ongoing funding provided through Building Services Corporation.
ACCESS - Tourism Hospitality Training	Developed as part of the new training arrangements under the auspices of Tourism Training Australia. The arrangements are written into Federal and all State awards except WA. ACCESS was launched in July 1991.	The service is managed by the ACCESS State/Territory Managers within national policy guidelines and procedures. Assessments are conducted by trained workplace assessors and industry assessors.	Specific training has been provided for line supervisors to enable them to conduct workplace assessments. This training involves a compulsory two day training program and they are then assessed carrying out a workplace assessment. Fee for two day program is $550, and they are then licensed for two years as workplace assessors. Industry Assessors undertake a further day's trianing on their role and the operation of ACCESS.	Start-up costs financed at the national level. Operating costs at the State level expected to be covered by fees and charges (ie self funding) but this will take time to achieve.

SCALE AND SCOPE OF SERVICE

Organisation	Target Group, Volume of applications	Projected Demand	Areas/Disciplines in which RPL is available
Trades Recognition Services (TRRA), Department of Industrial Relations.	Those who have gained trades skills - informally in Australia - through Australian Defence Forces - formally or informally overseas 1991/92 5249 applications were made nationally. 90% completed in 90 days. Of these 46% were migrants pre-assessed before arrival in Australia 34% were from migrants who had not been assessed prior to migration. 20% were from Australian applicants In the last two years over 8,600 have received recognition.	Anticipate further demand for trade recognition as a result of marketing efforts, especially in Australia.	Trade recognition in five groups . engineering . boilermaking . sheetmetal . blacksmithing . electrical
ACT Skills Recognition Service	People with proven work experience in the relevant occupation without credentials. Since the service started in 1990, there have been many enquiries and many information packages have been sent out. Cooking - 66 formal applications have been made and 32 certificates issued. Hairdressing - 13 formal applications have been made and 2 certificates issued. In other trades (available since 1992) approx 850 enquiries have been made, 500 packages despatched, 38 formal applications made. Assessment and teaching for these applicants to be conducted soon.	Response to scheme has been lower than expected. They detect a fear among workers that they may fail the assessment, so don't apply. When award restructuring happens they expect workers will be deemed to have specified skills (ie ASF Level 3) but will need to be assessed for higher levels.	Skills recognition now available in Cooking, Hairdressing, Carpentry and Joinery, Wall and Floor Tiling, Painting and Decorating, Bricklaying, Plastering, Signwriting and for Technical Officer (Electronics).

SCALE AND SCOPE OF SERVICE

Organisation	Target Group, Volume of applications	Projected Demand	Areas/Disciplines in which RPL is available
Tile Industry Training Committee and TAFECOM - Tile laying pilot project - NSW	Operatives in the building industry who do not hold acceptable TAFE (or equivalent) qualifications. For the pilot project the target group is Floor and Wall Tilers. 13 people were involved in the Tiling pilot project assessments held in May 1992.	Anticipate a massive increase once the Award is amended in November 1992.	'Pilot project' in Floor and Wall Tiling. Ultimately the service will extend to other building trades.
ACCESS	Basic and advanced operatives in the Hospitality industry with no formal quals. Since 1 January 1992 more than 300 assessments have been made - about two-thirds of these were in NSW. Over 500 candidates have been registered.	May extend ACCESS to supervisory and basic management levels. Expect increased demand as ACCESS becomes better known and the benefits to employers and employees are recognised. Current registration for assessment is about 70 per week. It is estimated that over 1,000 will be registered.	Recognition can be granted in the following areas . Food and Beverage . Front Office . Kitchen Attending

PROCESS FEATURES

Organisation	Fees and Charges	Limits on Credit	Benchmarks Used	Information and Application Stage
Trades Recognition Service (TRRA), Dept of Industrial Relations	Standard fees apply - $80 application plus $150 for trade test. (as at 1/11/91)These fees can be waived if applicant is receiving government income support. The trade test fee does not cover full costs to the Department.	Designed to provide 100% recognition of trade skills.	Formal recognition criteria for 45 countries based on reports of overseas study missions. Formal criteria also used for ADF applicants. Six/seven year "on-the-job" criteria for persons without formal training. LTCs endorse informal competency standards for trade tests.	Active marketing of service throughout metropolitan and country areas of Australia Counselling and support given on an individual basis by Technical Adviser in relation to: - requirements of the scheme - evidence requirements (TA provides preliminary assessment in relation to strength of applicant's claim) - appropriate learning which could be undertaken prior to formal assessment, candidate completes and lodges an application form. Post-assessment counselling offered to unsuccessful applicants.
ACT Skills Recognition Service	Information package provided at no cost. Fee for lodging application $55. If trade test required, fee is $175 with rebates possible (but rarely granted) through CES for unemployed, sole parents etc.	Service allows for both 100% recognition and partial recognition.	Informal competency standards developed by occupational experts and endorsed by local industry ITC's.	Extensive marketing of the scheme through media (press and trade journals), posters, brochures, contact with migrant resource centre and CONFACT. Employed promotion officer to launch service in building industry. 50% of enquiries are handled over phone and an information kit is sent out. Candidates self assess against checklist contained in package. Application lodged, and payment of $55, with Skill Recognition Registrar.

PROCESS FEATURES

Organisation	Fees and Charges	Limits on Credit	Benchmarks Used	Information and Application Stage
Tile Industry Training Committee and TAFECOM - Tile laying pilot project	Pricing policy not yet determined.	Designed to provide up to 100% recognition of trade level skills.	Industry developed competency standards.	Changes to 'Building Trades Licensing' advertised in trade journals and major dailies. People make enquiries to Building Services Corporation. Candidate completes an application form.
ACCESS	Candidates pay a registration fee of $35 for 12months. If assessed in the workplace by supervisor who is a licensed workplace assessor no further fee is charged. If they need an external assessor, the fee is set on the basis of modules but ranges from $35-55 per module.	No limit on the amount of recognition which may be granted but service is also designed to allow for recognition of modules and progressive skills formation.	Competency profile of each module based on competency standards endorsed by NTB.	ACCESS is marketed in SA through a wide variety of means. On request, applicants receive an Employee's Guide and registration form. After registration and payment of fee, applicant is sent a Career Portfolio together with Competency Profile for the stream they are interested in. Candidate then self-assesses against the competency profile and seeks assessment for certain specified modules. Prior to assessment the workplace assessor briefs the candidate on what is involved and what the standards are.

PROCESS FEATURES

Organisation	Evidence Considered	Assessment Arrangements	Post-assessment Guidance	Appeal Mechanisms	Recording/Recognition Arrangements
Trades Recognition Service (TRRA) Dept of Industrial Relations	. Application form . Evidence of formal studies . Evidence of related experience . References from employers . Technical Adviser's report with its recommendation to Local Trades Committee . Standard of English language where this is appropriate.	Technical adviser reviews application form and evidence. Can defer for applicant to provide additional information or attend a technical interview. May make a site visit or contact employer to confirm claim. TA prepares report and recommendation for Local Trades Committee. Local Trades Committee reviews all evidence and makes recommendation. a) grant recognition, or b) refuse recognition, or c) request trade test. TA arranges trade test if required at Skills Centre, private provided or TAFE College.	Trades Committee decision recorded in minutes. Letter is issued to applicant a) advice of result and issue of Trade Certificate b) explanation and offer to discuss outcome with TA if unsuccessful c) advice on trade test. Candidate must confirm willingness to sit trade test. TA interviews candidates in face-to-face situation for (b) and (c). Post-decision counselling to embrace advice re bridging/additional training.	Appeals to be handled by Central Trades Committees.	All outcomes recorded on a data base. This generates a Trade Certificate for successful applicant. Confidentiality protected by Privacy Act.
ACT Skills Recognition Service	. Evidence provided by candidate on application form. . Interview responses . Performance in a trade test may be requested.	Training supervisor distributes application to member of Skills Advisory Panel for a preliminary assessment. Skills Advisory Panel interviews candidates and may then request a trade test if uncertain about competency. Panel makes a recommendation to Vocational Training Authority.	Candidates unable to demonstrate 100% competencies will be counselled on the training or experience they need to do to reach an acceptable level of competency and where to get this training or experience in a post-assessment interview with the Panel.	Candidates can appeal and are informed about the appeals process. A Skill Recognition Appeal Committee comprising 3-4 people, will meet and review the initial decision.	Developing a skills recognition data base. Successful candidates are issued with a Certificate.

PROCESS FEATURES

Organisation	Evidence Considered	Assessment Arrangements	Post-assessment Guidance	Appeal Mechanisms	Recording/Recognition Arrangements
Tile Industry Training Committee - Tile laying pilot project, NSW	Wide range of evidence considered including: . Employers' reports . Pictures of work undertaken . Qualifications (overseas) . Practical demonstration/ trade test . Oral theory test Criteria includes 4 years relevant work experience	Initial cull made by BSC on basis of 4 years relevant work experience. Assessments are carried out by RPL Advisor and a skills specialist using: 1. an interview 2. practical test at the Building Industry Skills Centre RPL Advisor will be screening candidates at a pre-assessment interview	Specific training programs are developed for people whose skills could not be recognised. Due to costs this will be modified to a fee-for service arrangement.		Candidates will be issued with a "skills card". Successful candidates will be issued with a licence by BSC.
ACCESS	Assessment entails observation of practice in the workplace or in a suitable assessment centre and theory test (written test and/or oral questioning) Parameters for the assessment method are set out in the competency profile for each module.	ACCESS State Manager arranges workplace assessment if a trained workplace assessor is available in house. Otherwise, provided employer agrees an external assessor is invited in to conduct w.p. assessment. Alternative is for candidate to go to an assessment centre. Assessor completes an Assessment Summary proforma.	Workplace candidates can seek a second assessment within the workplace or appeal. Appeals are undertaken by Industry Assessors	Unhappy candidates can seek a second assessment within the workplace or appeal. Appeals are undertaken by Industry Assessors.	If candidate succeeds in the Module assessment, a copy of Assessment Summary is provided for inclusion in the Portfolio. Results are entered into national data base. Candidates can request an official transcript form State Office to update their career portfolios.

APPENDIX 4

The Application of RPL by Enterprises for Employment Purposes

4.1 Introduction

Recognition of prior learning is beginning to interest a growing number of individual enterprises who can see it contributing to an integrated human resource management strategy in their organisation. These enterprises are involved in change on many fronts - in redesigning jobs, in identifying competencies required in particular jobs, in restructuring awards and creating career paths.

From this perspective, recognition of the current competencies of the workforce could help employers and employees negotiate their way through some of this change. Provided time and cost effective methods of assessment are available, RPL could:

* assist the reclassification of workers in new awards incorporating job redesign and reduce the subjectivity of the traditional award grading system;

* provide training that is targeted and cost effective. Time is not lost for training's sake - training is targeted at missing skills and competencies;

* be used to audit current skills and competencies within the workforce, or in critical areas and operations. The organisation could then maximise the use of these existing skills and competencies; and

* be used as a human resource development tool for recruitment, performance appraisal, succession planning and for helping employees clarify their aspirations and career development needs.

Four case studies have been selected for this study:

Rural Water Corporation - Victoria

Concrete Constructions Group - New South Wales

Ford Motor Company of Australia

QANTAS

to illustrate approaches to RPL taken by Australian enterprises.

A number of enterprises have started to plan the introduction of RPL. They are determining the approach they will use, developing materials and securing training for staff. Some have mounted pilot projects. Enterprises in the developmental stage include:

Arnotts Biscuits	Mitsubishi
Containers Packaging	Orlando-Wyndham Group
G.M. Holden Engine Company	Westpac
ICI	Caltex Oil
Civil and Civic	Holiday Inn Menzies
APM Forests	Mobil Oil
Kone Elevators (Aus)	Worsley Alumina
BHP Coal Moura Mine	

The developmental efforts have, in many cases, been actively and financially supported by the Victorian and NSW Education Foundations. In Sydney, organisations interested in exploring RPL are participating in the Recognition of Current Competencies Network. This network is a forum for the exchange of information, experiences and ideas.

A smaller number of enterprises have advanced to the stage of providing RPL to their employees. Some enterprises, such as Argyle Diamond Mines, have a well established RPL service available.

4.2 Concrete Constructions Group Pty. Ltd.

Concrete Constructions is Australia's largest privately owned construction and civil engineering group offering a wide range of professional construction and project management services. The company has 950 employees and engages many sub-contractors on company projects.

In its recent application to the Australian Industrial Relations Commission for certification of an agreement (s.115), the company stated its commitment to the development of its employees in the key areas of skills acquisition, efficiency and motivation.

> *From 1987 the Company began developing a strategic direction for workplace reform, which included discussing with employees, unions, tribunal, governments and other relevant bodies what our approach should be. Initially we concentrated on reducing lost time, removing restrictive work practices and investigating the mechanisms to develop better skills and flexibilities in the workforce.*
>
> *From 1988 the Company began negotiating Restructuring and Skills Enhancement Agreements, the initial one covering tower crane drivers, attendants and dogmen, followed by riggers and hoist drivers, and in late 1989 a restructuring agreement was reached covering all employees in NSW and ACT.*

These agreements deal with job redesign, training needs analysis and development. On-site pilot training programs were initiated to support restructuring. The Company is now putting in place appropriate training programs across its workforce to allow employees "to participate fully in their new roles and to gain opportunities for advancement and the higher pay which attaches to higher skill levels". The company has recently obtained

registered private training provider status with the Victorian State Training Board.

RPL is an integral part of the Skills Enhancement Agreement. Management commitment is very strong and the company estimates that it will take up to three years for the Agreement to be fully accepted and implemented. The Company intends to extend its training provisions throughout the workforce to the supervisor level and, ultimately, to its sub-contractors. The Agreement and the RPL provisions are promoted at communication meetings on site, site visits and through the company magazine which is mailed out to all employees.

4.3 Rural Water Corporation, Victoria

The Corporation prepared a skills formation strategy to support the initiatives in award restructuring and workplace reform outlined in its Business Plan 1990/91 - 1994/95. Two major occupational groups a distribution workforce and a construction/maintenance workforce, comprising some 1000 employees dispersed across Victoria are to be merged and covered by a single award. Cross skilling of the two workforces is essential.

As part of the skills formation strategy the Corporation designed a suite of three articulated courses which have now been accredited. The Corporation sought and obtained registered private training provider status with the State Training Board in Victoria.

RPL is built into the course design as existing skills are recognised and training then provided in new skills. RPL offers the applicant both the opportunity of gaining advanced standing into an accredited course and access to higher classifications based on skills.

The course is modular in format with learning outcomes and performance criteria for each module. There is a mix of technical training and management skills. Training "is largely conducted on-the-job and comprises self-paced modules which rely on supervisors providing mentor support to guide them through the program".

Management commitment to the training program and the RPL component is good. Full acceptance and implementation within the Corporation and its workforce is expected to take between 12 and 18 months. All employees will then have equitable access to a skill-based career path. The Corporation believes that the processes it has followed which involved extensive consultation and use of workplace expertise in initially identifying skills, developing the course and designing instructional material, have been a vital factor in gaining employee, union and management support.

4.4 Ford Motor Company of Australia Ltd.

Ford pioneered RPL in Australia when it sought to have its in-house training accredited

by Broadmeadows College of TAFE in 1988/89. This led to the development of an accredited Vehicle Industry Certificate (VIC) designed initially for the vehicle manufacturing industry and refined by Ford for its employees.

Ford had a genuine interest in encouraging its non-trade workforce to undertake this training. The Company believed that by offering formal recognition for the skills employees already possessed, more would take up training opportunities than might otherwise be the case. The 2 500 who applied for RPL and continued in VIC studies confirms their belief. Ford employees can gain an accredited qualification and new career path opportunities within the industry.

RPL within the VIC at Ford was designed primarily to encourage workers to commit themselves to training. Secondly, completion of units within the VIC underpinned award classification decisions. A clear basis for classification decisions and genuine career progression was thus created.

With 8,500 employees eligible to be assessed, the Company sought a process that was both fair and not too costly. The approach described in the following tables was negotiated in the Australian Industrial Relations Commission as a "transitional arrangement" capped at the end of December 1992. The arrangement was one set up to deal with a likely high volume demand for RPL over an 18 month period in a particular industrial relations climate.

The use of panels (supervisor, union representative and Ford training officer) demanded substantial commitment of resources by the Company. The benefits in terms of staff morale, upskilling of employees and the shopfloor benefits of bringing parties together, while not quantified, are believed to have justified the expense.

4.5 QANTAS

The QANTAS program involves a training partnership with Regency College of TAFE in South Australia. Like the other case studies, QANTAS planned this training development for its flight catering staff in the context of a restructured Federal award. RPL, or "Give Yourself Some Credit" as it is marketed to staff, is an integral feature of the whole training arrangement.

QANTAS recognises that its employees' skills may have been developed through a variety of means:

- Formal courses of study
- Direct work experience
- Informal self directed study (through personal interest, hobbies)
- In-house/company based training
- Working with experts in the field.

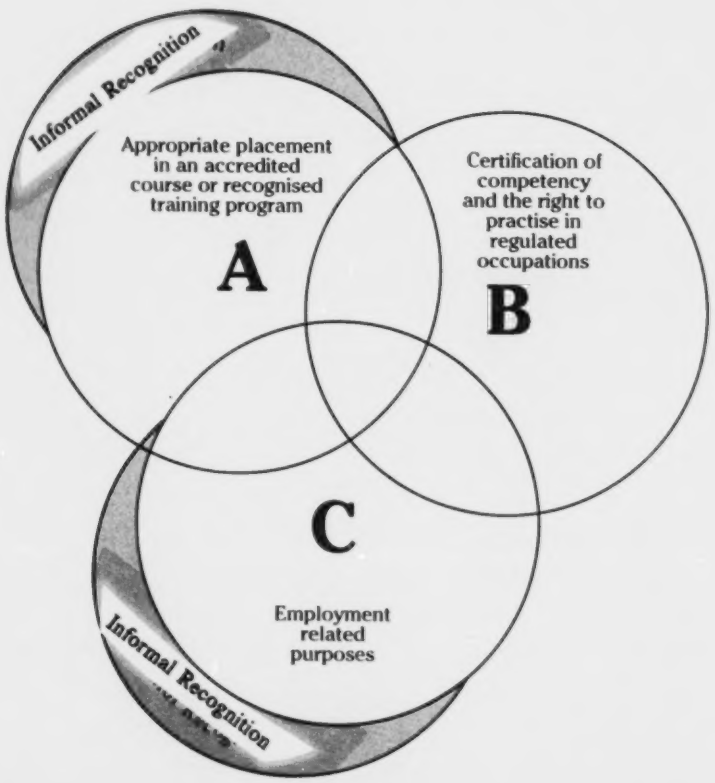
The training program is in modular format based on enterprise competency standards or NTB endorsed hospitality industry standards where these exist. Supervisors and managers have been trained to take on the workplace trainer/assessor function. The RPL process QANTAS is using is described as being modelled on the Simosko approach.

4.6 Observations and issues

This section summarises the main features of the case studies and the issues raised by the many enterprise representatives consulted during the study. Comments made by Sue Stafford of Containers Packaging at a recent conference have also been incorporated.

Many individual enterprises have seized upon the potential of RPL to meet a range of current human resource development issues. Its possibilities are being progressively explored. In terms of the applications of RPL diagrammatically shown below, the Rural Water Corporation (with its accredited courses), Ford Motor Company and QANTAS lie within the intersecting circles A and C in the following diagram.

Applications of RPL



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4.6.1 RPL as an integral part of new enterprise training efforts

In the four case studies, RPL is an integral part of a new enterprise training program. RPL is seen as a means of placing an individual at the appropriate place within that training program so as not to duplicate learning.

In two of the case studies (Ford and QANTAS) the design of the training program has been a joint venture with a TAFE college. In Ford's case, the delivery of training, in Company training facilities, is given by TAFE and university staff. The Rural Water Corporation and Concrete Constructions are providing the training themselves.

4.6.2 RPL as an integral part of new awards and career path opportunities

Again, in each of the case studies, the context of these new training efforts (and therefore RPL) was the broader canvas of workplace change and moves to enhance productivity. Completion of units or modules of training provides a clear basis for award classification decisions and career paths for employees. Union support has been forthcoming in all cases.

4.6.3 Strong management commitment to the training programs and RPL

Strong support from management was noted in each case study. This support was given in real resource terms and in acceptance of the time frame needed for its full adoption.

4.6.4 Size of the organisation

The enterprises currently implementing RPL are large. The scale of their training effort (and, by extension, the volume of RPL assessments) is considerable. Start-up and training costs can be defrayed across a large number of employees. The enterprises are also large enough to have dedicated training staff who are able to plan and bring the program to fruition.

4.6.5 Reliance on workplace "experts", supervisors and managers to conduct assessments

Each of the enterprises provides training for respected workplace experts, supervisory staff and managers so that they are able to take on the new role of workplace trainer/assessor. The selection of well respected workers to assess RPL claims, as well as progress in the training program, is a distinctive feature of all case studies.

4.6.6 Development of a skills data base

Case study enterprises are using data bases as a means of recording and retaining information about the employee's progressive acquisition of competencies. This can form

the basis for a continually updated workforce skill profile.

4.6.7 Skills passports

Similarly, to allow employees to record and retain progressive acquisition of competencies through training some enterprises, such as Rural Water Corporation of Victoria, are adopting a skill passport system.

4.6.8 Preferred assessment approach

Applicants are encouraged to assemble their claim giving supporting evidence on the application forms. This provides the initial evidence for RPL decision-making. The use of an interview/oral assessment and perhaps a workplace demonstration to supervisors or peers were the assessment methods most widely in use. In the case studies, RPL assessments serve both a diagnostic and judgmental function.

4.6.9 Assistance for newcomers

The lack of a blueprint that explains why and how to introduce RPL into an enterprise with the "minimum level of difficulty" was a source of concern. Models are documented for the education setting but examples in an employment setting are rare. If case studies ("video clips and caselets") are publicised, it was felt that faster implementation would result. Enterprises could adopt or adapt successful approaches trialled elsewhere. Networking and packages to guide, support and communicate the process in the workplace were suggested as other ways of assisting newcomers.

4.6.10 Benchmarks

The Rural Water Corporation representative commented that ".... benchmarks are a key issue - without clearly agreed standards the process is compromised". This view was supported by Concrete Constructions and QANTAS.

The case study enterprises have expended considerable energy and effort in defining their standards. Other enterprises reported being confused about how to develop competency standards and whether to wait for such standards to be developed by the industry. Developing competency standards at the enterprise level entails costs for the company. There was a perception that initial competency standards will have to be reworked and this both discourages work on enterprise standards and makes it harder to secure management commitment.

4.6.11 Cost and time effective methods in RPL are vital

One respondent frankly said that "a level of expediency is essential to reduce time taken in conducting assessment in the workplace, and the collection and documentation of

evidence". From the employer's perspective, assessment is not a value adding activity. But a "level of expediency" is an uncomfortable concept for many public training providers and assessment authorities from whom enterprises seek advice.

Ford estimates that about 3150 hours of assessors' time was involved in their large scale RPL exercise. This was time supervisors, training officers and shop stewards had to be released from their normal duties. The need for time as well as cost effective RPL methods was reinforced by many respondents.

4.6.12 Attitudinal barriers

Attitudinal barriers in the workplace need to be acknowledged and defused. The terms "competency assessment" and "RPL" are confusing. In times of restructuring and high unemployment, "assessment" raises fear and anxiety.

One respondent commented "There should be no significant problem if the process is driven by users and supported actively by management - change management is part of installing RPL". In her opinion RPL process needs to give priority to communication and to securing union and employee support. Securing union and employee confidence in the fairness of the process will be eased if the process has certain features. The benefits to employees must be demonstrable. Concerns about subjectivity in assessment need to be addressed through training for assessors and clear assessment criteria or standards. Credible and acceptable individuals, or panels, need to be chosen and trained as workplace assessors. Appeal processes need to be instituted. Enterprises need to market the new training arrangements and RPL provisions to employees.

4.6.13 A project management approach to the implementation of RPL.

Several respondents noted the careful planning and management required to implement a new training approach with RPL. A strong project management approach with critical path analysis, time lines and milestones was advocated by several respondents.

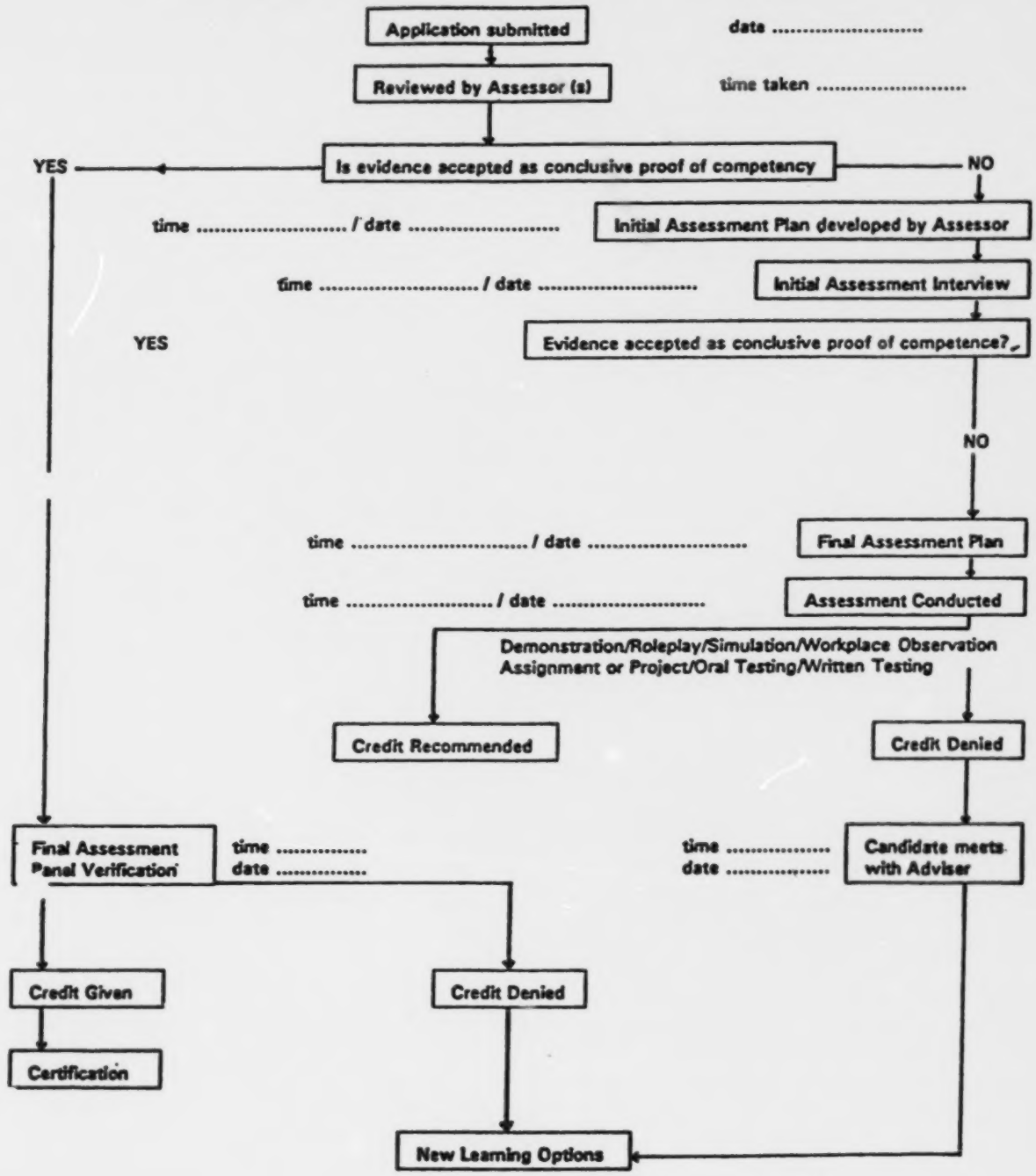
4.6.14 Training for a cross-section of employees

The need for training employees in workplace assessment, RPL, assessment methods and record keeping was frequently reported. This is a new area of skill development for many enterprises and they are looking to training providers and consultants to come up with assessor training programs suitable for the workplace.

4.6.15 Application of RPL for other human resource development purposes

Ideas were sought on how to integrate RPL concepts and approaches into recruitment, training, succession planning and performance appraisal approaches in organisations.

Recognition of Prior Learning Process (QANTAS)



Summary :

Total time taken ..... / Date Received ..... / Date Processed ..... / Days .....

Comments :

ORGANISATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

Organisation	Authorisation/ Mandate	Management Arrangements and Staffing	Training for Advisers/Assessors	Resourcing (set-up/ongoing)
Rural Water Corporation - Victoria	New restructured award has merged two previously separate workforces	Overall management of the total training program and the RPL aspect rests with Manager: Training Services. District Manager will manage/co-ordinate RPL in their area as this is considered a normal component of a manager's/ supervisor's role.	Specific RPL training sessions have been given to District Managers.	Resourcing of whole training program has been an issue.
Concrete Constructions Group Pty Ltd - NSW	Skills Enhancement and Restructuring Agreements	Training Manager has overall responsibility for RPL. The actual recognition/assessment is carried out by workforce trainers/assessors.	Training has been provided for workforce trainers/assessors in the delivery of training and assessment of competencies. This training has been given by NSW Building Construction ITC. "Nominated workers who have the common respect of employees and management have been trained as assessors."	The company has provided the start-up costs and operating budget for the training development program.
Ford Motor Company of Australia Ltd	Ford Australia Vehicle Industry Award - determination of Commissioner Gay, June 1991.	Education and Personnel Research Manager has overall responsibility for RPL. The assessments are carried out by three person Review Panels of company staff. Disputed and complex assessments are handled by a four person Assessment Panel.	Three hour RPL assessment training program was given by Broadmeadows College of TAFE to shop floor trainers, supervisors and managers. A two day training program in RPL was given to members of Assessment Panel.	Start-up costs were absorbed in the training budget. The initial cycle of RPL assessments for 2,500 people estimated to involve 3150 hours for "assessors".

ORGANISATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

Organisation	Authorisation/ Mandate	Management Arrangements and Staffing	Training for Advisers/Assessors	Resourcing (set-up/ongoing)
QANTAS	1991 pilot commenced with redevelopment of training system. Reinforced by new award (Liquor Trades award covering chefs and catering attendants).	Regency College has provided the project manager RPL assessments made by managers, supervisors and specialist staff. Managers and supervisors have been trained to become on-the-job assessors and trainers.	Managers, supervisors and specialist staff trained in RPL procedures.	Joint funding of the pilot scheme by DEET and Education and Training Foundation NSW.

SCALE AND SCOPE OF SERVICE

Organisation	Target Group, volume of applications	Projected Demand	Areas/Disciplines in which RPL is available
Rural Water Corp, Victoria	Corporation's operational workforce with the new restructured award two workforces have been merged and cross skilling is required. Corporation's workforce comprises: 504 Water Distribution Officers, 534 Construction and Maintenance Workers RPL will become available from 1/7/92	Too early to say informatively.	Suite of accredited courses has been developed and accredited to meet corporation's needs: .Certificate in Water Resources Management .Adv Cert in Water Resources Management .Ass Dip of Applied Science (Water Resources Management)
Concrete Constructions - NSW	Training (and therefore RPL) is targeted at the Company's workforce to supervisor level. Plans are afoot to extend this to sub-contractors. In 1991/92 200 employees were assessed.	The Company expects an increase in demand for RPL as the system becomes more established and employees realise its benefits. An increase in employment levels may also result in an increased demand.	Initially the Company is concentrating on core and basic skills (eg Safety Generic Oxy Cutting, Scaffolding, Hoist Driving/Plant, Drawing Interpretation, Formwork, Cleaning). Later on more specialised skills will be covered in training program and assessed.
Ford Motor Company	Initially RPL was offered to the Company's non-trade workforce of 8,500. In 1991/92 2500 employees sought RPL for the Vehicle Industry Certificate	"Through the bow wave". The transitional arrangements for RPL cease in December 1992. Thereafter the pre-employment process will involve assessment for award classification.	The initial RPL exercise involved awarding credit towards 40 units (skill and knowledge) units in Vehicle Industry Certificate. More recently RPL for Ford employees has been negotiated with TAFE and higher education authorities for: Vehicle Industry Advanced Certificate Ford Supervision Certificate Technology Management This training is provided in Ford's Training Centre by university/TAFE lecturers.

SCALE AND SCOPE OF SERVICE

Organisation	Target Group, Volume of applications	Projected Demand	Areas/Disciplines in which RPL is available
QANTAS	QANTAS flight catering staff - there are large numbers of chefs and catering attendants covered by the Federal Liquor Trades award. From 1990 to mid 1992 approx 900 chefs and catering applied. Expect 1,100 by end of 1992.	Expect major increase as a result of successful demonstration of the process. Expect to extend scheme to cabin crew.	Catering Service Chefs Pastry Chef Stores (ancillary) expect to extend scheme to cabin crew.

PROCESS FEATURES

Organisation	Fees and Charges	Limits on Credit	Benchmarks Used	Information and Application Stage
Rural Water Corporation - Victoria	There are no costs/fees for training or RPL		Learning outcomes of modules developed by RWC with performance standards and conditions of assessment.	Workplace briefing sessions are held in all districts. A video and brochure about the new training program are used in these sessions. Initial contact is made with applicant's supervisor who arranges a meeting with either himself or District Co-Ordinator. Applicant completes an application form giving details of skills possessed as well as modules in which training is sought.
Concrete Constructions - NSW	No costs/fees for training or RPL		Standards developed by the Company and standards endorsed by the NTB	Information about Skills Enhancement Program is given at communication meetings on site and through company magazine. Initial enquires are dealt with on site, then referred to Head office Employee completes an Application Form.
Ford Motor Company	No costs/fees for training or RPL.	Limits on credit which can be claimed vary according to course.	Performance against current Job Certification Sheet, and breadth of experience.	The Company advised employees by letter of RPL provisions. VIC was promoted widely in the company. Employee completes a detailed application form outlining claim for specific VIC units.

PROCESS FEATURES

Organisation	Fees and Charges	Limits on Credit	Benchmarks Used	Information and Application Stage
QANTAS	No charge for assessments	No	Enterprise based competency standards and NTB endorsed standards where they are available.	The program is advertised to company employees by leaflet. Training co-ordinator responds to initial enquiries and discusses the process with candidate. Brochures and an application form are given to candidate to complete. Project manager undertakes initial screening.

PROCESS FEATURES

Organisation	Evidence Considered	Assessment Arrangements	Post-assessment Guidance	Appeal Mechanisms	Recording/Recognition Arrangements
Rural Water Corp - Victoria	.Application form with info about skills applicant already has. .Referee checks .Examples of performance/ demonstration/skills tests .Other evidence submitted	District Manager conducts an initial screening. Panel of three people do the detailed assessment. Panel membership is agreed by applicant. Guidance on appropriate assessment methods is given in curriculum documentation.	Panel provides guidance to assist applicant meet standards in learning outcomes not verified.	Desk top audit of Assessment Panel's papers by Program Manager. Few appeals expected if RPL process is observed.	Learning outcomes achieved are entered into a Skills Data Base. Employee receives a skill passport quarterly - can access updated info at any stage.
Concrete Constructions - NSW	.Application form (which also gives some indication of literacy). .Documentary evidence such as DIRE tickets, TAFE certificates .Interview responses .Practical demonstration of skills	Assessment is carried out by a trained workplace assessor or Training Administrator or co-ordinator at the work place. Assessment involves a mix of oral questioning and practical demonstration of skills.	Training needs are identified through the assessment process. Candidate is then provided with on-site training by assessor/trainer.		Outcome of RPL is recorded on a central database. Certificates are issued to successful candidates.
Ford Motor Company	.Application form .Breadth of experience .Documentary evidence .Interview responses .Practical demonstration of skills from Job Certificate Sheets.	Review Panel conducts initial interview with applicant. Review Panel comprises three representatives (supervisor, training officer and union representative). May observe workplace demonstration. Applicants falling below competency standard are then further assessed by four person Assessment Panel.	VIC Credits are allocated on basis of RPL Table. Successful applicants are advised of credits and further training. Unsuccessful candidates are advised about Assessment Panel's review function.	Assessment Panel forms an appeal mechanism for disputed cases.	Credits towards VIC are allocated on the basis of the RPL Table and recorded.

PROCESS FEATURES

Organisation	Evidence Considered	Assessment Arrangements	Post-assessment Guidance	Appeal Mechanisms	Recording/Recognition Arrangements
QANTAS	A range of evidence is considered .application form .portfolio of evidence (eg photos, menus) .evidence of systems .references from peers and supervisors/managers .statements from training providers Second stage assessment may involve workplace observation, testing.	Modelled on Simosko's APL process. See flow chart - with initial assessment and, if necessary, a second stage assessment. Project Manager and supervisor assess evidence.	Discussion of learning options for unsuccessful applicants with adviser.	Application to Manager/Union/Supervisor. Appeals to Executive Chef and Union representative (based on Simasko's model)	Recognition may be given in two forms: 1.as a Professional Development record or 2.Academic Statement. Competencies are recorded on "Manager Management System"

APPENDIX 5

List of Abbreviations Used

ACTRAC	Australian Committee for Training Curriculum
APEL	Accreditation/Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning
APL	Accreditation of Prior Learning
BTEC	Business & Technician Education Council (UK)
NCVQ	National Council for Vocational Qualifications (UK)
NFROT	National Framework for the Recognition of Training
NOOSR	National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition
NTB	National Training Board
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification (UK)
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SCOTVEC	Scottish Vocational Education Council
SESDA	State Employment & Skills Development Authority (WA)
SVQ	Scottish Vocational Qualification
STB	Office of the State Training Board, Victoria
TRRA	The Tradesmen's Rights Regulation Act
TA	Training Agency (UK)
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
VEETAC	Vocational Education Employment and training Advisory Committee
VETEC	Vocational Education, Training and Employment Commission (Qld)

APPENDIX 6

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